A MODERN EXODUS

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THE CARE OF THE INVALID WAS THE FIRST DUTY.

A MODERN EXODUS

BY

FAYE HUNTINGTON

Author of
Those Boys
Echoing and Re-echoing
Mrs. Deane's Way
and others

"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you."

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

CALLED 1

CHAPTER II.

CHANGES 9

CHAPTER III.

FACING THINGS 21

CHAPTER IV.

AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS . . 33

CHAPTER V.

REACHING OUT 54

CHAPTER VI.

"OLD GOLD" 63

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW DEPARTURE 75

CHAPTER VIII.

THE QUESTION OF TRIBUTE 89

CHAPTER IX.

STEPHEN A CUMBERER 99

CHAPTER X.

JOHN'S MARAH 106

CHAPTER XI.

PLAIN SPEAKING 120

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 130

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TALKING MULTITUDE 139

CHAPTER XIV.

SHOULDERS, OR CONSCIENCE? 152

CHAPTER XV.

DEBT, DOUBT AND DELIVERANCE . . 165

CHAPTER XVI.

ROYAL BOUNTY 180

CHAPTER XVII.

OUTGROWING THINGS 192

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MINORITY REPORT 205

CHAPTER XIX.

PRAYER 216

CHAPTER XX.

HEARD WHILE YET SPEAKING 228

CHAPTER XXI.

DEAN BEGINS HIS WORK 242

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RE-ECHO OF A SERMON 256

CHAPTER XXIII.

SATAN PLANS AN OVERTHROW . . . 272

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOY'S IDEA OF BUSINESS 284

CHAPTER XXV.

MEMORIAL STONES 301

CHAPTER XXVI.

JERICHO 314

CHAPTER XXVII.

COL. PARSONS SUMS UP THE CASE . . 330

A MODERN EXODUS.

CHAPTER I.

CALLED.

"And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him."

THE real name of the Moses who was the leader in this Modern Exodus was John Heckman, and by that name I shall speak of him as I write out this record of his life — an uneventful life, as we look at lives. The Heckmans were happy and prosperous when this young fellow first made his appearance in the household, a fat, black-eyed baby. He ate and slept, smiled and cooed, like other babies. Later, he grew mischievous and wayward. As more years went by, he ran upon errands and went to school, joined in the coasting and snow-balling frolics, and came

home with bruised head and frosted ears. In summer he picked berries in the pasture and went fishing; in short, up to his tenth year he lived a happy, careless young life, with little to distinguish him from the average country boy.

About that time a shadow rested upon the home. At first it seemed but a passing cloud, but instead of dispersing it grew heavier and denser, and by and by culminated in the darkness of death.

They were sitting together in the twilight of a dark November day, the widow and the fatherless, and the friends who had come to them in the hour of their great sorrow. They had not been saying much. The brothers and sisters would go away in the morning, and the broken family would take up their burden of living, and it seemed to the bereaved wife that now there could never be any living that would not be a burden.

Mr. John Heckman sat for some time with an arm thrown about his namesake nephew. He had not joined at all in the low and broken conversation that went on among the others of the group, but seemed lost in thought. Presently he roused himself and said —

"I think, Abbie, that, if you are willing, I will take John, here, home with me for a time. It will be one less for you to care for, and I see no other way to help you. I think Lewis" — here

the strong man faltered for an instant, but he quickly recovered himself and went on — "Lewis has made very wise plans for your future; but at best you will have your hands full, and as you will hardly like to let your one girl go away from you, the best I can do is to take John."

After some discussion it was settled that John was to go with his uncle for a few months — "Until I see my way a little clearer," the mother said, adding, "I cannot think of giving up my boy altogether." And the kind-hearted, wise brother replied —

"Certainly not. You shall have him back whenever you say the word. And, sister Abbie, be assured that, as long as he remains with us, he will have the same care and advantages that my own son would have."

The months lengthened into years, and still John did not come home. There never came a time when Mrs. Heckman saw her way clearer — rather, her way grew more and more obscured — and there never came a time when she felt that it would be better for John to come back to her, though her heart was breaking with the longing for this child, the one whom everybody said was "so like his father." Wearily she lived on until six years had gone by. Once, a year or two after John left home, she wrote, urging a visit. His uncle replied —

DEAR SISTER ABBIE:

If you have not fully determined to take John from us this year — and I hope you will not — we think it better for you to come here. It will do you good to get away from the old place; and besides, I cannot very well leave just now to go with John, so I enclose a check for your traveling expenses.

During the visit Mr. Heckman drew enough from the sad-faced woman for him to understand that things were not going on as well as could be wished, and he made up his mind that, if possible, he would keep John. However, he said very little about it. He suggested that, as the school advantages in their little town were unusually fine for a place of its size, it might be as well to let John stay on for a year or two, at least, adding — "If the boy should decide that he would like to take a full course, I shall stand ready to help him; but that is a matter to discuss later." Then the mother went back to her home, thankful in her heart that one boy was doing well. And so, as I have said, the years went on until John was nearly sixteen. He had grown up thoughtful for his years, perhaps more thoughtful than boys of his age usually are.

With this bit of introduction, I come now to the point where my story more properly begins.

A bright June morning, and John Heckman sitting in his uncle's pew in the village church, waiting for the message the preacher might bring to

him; and, as I think of him thus, there comes to me a sentence from the beginning of that other story lived so long ago — "And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him." It was a bright worshiping-place. The green upon which the building stood was elevated a little above the level of the street, and a stone terrace added to the neat appearance of the surroundings. Stone steps led up from the sidewalk, and gravel walks followed graceful curves to the entrance of the church. The lawn was shaded by elms and maples, and dotted with evergreens. Inside, through the mullioned stained-glass windows, the sunlight streamed in over a mossy carpet and comfortably upholstered pews. Over the pulpit or platform, upon the wall, in illuminated text, were the words, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise." After all, I cannot describe that church. There were certain nameless characteristics, things felt rather than seen. Perhaps it was that the people loved the place, that they came with reverence, and that upon the faces of many who were accustomed to worship within the sacred walls there rested the peace that passeth understanding; that the glory within so illumined the countenance that of them it might be said, "Their faces shone, for they had been with God." It may be that in an especial manner the Holy Spirit rested upon

that congregation. I cannot think that it was just the beauty of the frescoes or of the tinted glass, the perfume of the flowers or the sweet tones of the organ, that made the difference between that church and many others. It may be that the sweet Christian spirit of the worshiping congregation had much to do with the peculiar attraction of the place; and again, it may be that the preacher had been dwelling upon the mount so that his face shone with a heavenly radiance. I know not why it was, that, with its simple and inexpensive adornings, it seemed so peculiarly the temple of the Most High.

I have wondered what might have been in the mind of that pastor as, in the privacy of his study, he thought out that sermon. I can fancy him fitting it to the needs of his people, hoping and praying that by the words he should be given to speak to them, some might be led to take up new duties, enter upon untried work. Perhaps he thought of this one as being led to speak to the stranger, that one taking up prayer-meeting duty, another giving himself to Sunday School or mission work; and, perhaps, after all his thought and fitting, he prayed that the Lord would take his words and fill them with His Spirit, and let them not fall to the ground, but rather that they might reach some heart with help, encouragement or inspiration, as might be the special need. It may

be that the preacher never saw in his own parish the least fruit of that morning's seed-sowing. Yet the fruit was rich and abundant.

The words of the text were, "What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod." The thought of the sermon was that God can make the single and simple instrument that we hold in our loose grasp an effective weapon for His service, and that we may not hold back from service because of weakness or inefficiency. John Heckman, listening, felt a thrill as if the Lord had called him to an especial work. And yet, as he thought it over after church, he did not understand what he felt sure had been the voice of his Master. There was nothing in his life or in his surroundings to call for any unusual effort or service. He had been accustomed to take his part in the young people's prayer-meeting; he had for some months been teaching a class in the primary department of the Sunday School. It was none of these duties to which God seemed to be calling him. He wondered if it could be possible that God meant him to be a minister.

Long he thought and wondered what it meant, this strong impression that service of a sort different from any of his own planning was waiting for him somewhere. At length he knelt, and the burden of his prayer was — "Here, Lord, am I. Though I hold but a rod, thou canst make it a

power, and I am waiting to be shown what it is that thou hast for me to do." And often in the days that followed closely upon this solemn hour of consecration he prayed this prayer for direction.

He had not long to wait. One morning they sat together at the breakfast table, knelt together at the family altar, and went their several ways, little thinking that it was the last time. At noon John stood beside the lifeless body of the one who had been as a father to him for nearly six years. So unexpectedly had the summons come to the strong man.

CHAPTER II.

CHANGES.

"Come now, therefore, and I will send thee."

PLANS for the ordering of the changed household matured rapidly. John's uncle had always meant to provide for the boy who had been like a son to him; but, as is too often the case, had neglected to make the provision. Though Mrs. John Heckman was fond of her husband's nephew, she did not feel a responsibility for his future; indeed, the burden of caring for herself and her one daughter was almost more than she could bear. John was now old enough to look out for himself, and, as she decided to close the house and go to live with her parents, she considered her duty done when she had put John's wardrobe in order, furnished him with an entire winter outfit, purchased his ticket to his old home, and given him, at parting, a draft for one hundred dollars. She

carefully packed his trunk, which was a large one that had been her husband's, putting in books from the library, and adding gifts for the members of the family at home, and then she said —

"John, do you think your sister would care for some of my dresses to make over? You know I shall never wear them now, and Ella is too young to make it worth while to keep them or cut them over for her. I could put in my brown cashmere and that summer silk you like so much; and there's that heavy wine-colored one — she might as well have that, too. I think your uncle would like to have me send them."

"Thank you, Auntie; I am sure you are very kind, and I am afraid that new dresses are scarce with mother and Beth nowadays. I am certain that things are not going well at home. I do not understand about it, but I begin to think that there will be work for me there."

"I know your uncle was troubled about them; he said he could not understand Joe's going away, and why your mother said so little about him in her letters."

"She seldom mentions him," said John, "and I don't know what to think."

"Well, you know that Mr. Hummel will give you a place if you conclude to come back. I sometimes think you would do better to stay here, though I

think you are right to go and see how they are getting along. But if you come back you will find friends."

"It seems almost ungrateful to refuse such a good offer as Mr. Hummel has made me; but I am sure it is right to go to my mother, and it is doubtful if I come back right away."

And so it came about that, one autumn day, John Heckman, toiling up the long road that led from the station to West Hill, came in sight of his old home. Surely this was the place, yet could it be? Was that the home he had left? It did not look as he remembered it. The Heckman homestead had been the typical farm-house of fifty years ago, built by Grandfather Heckman to last. This is what the boy expected to find — a large house, painted white, green blinds, and a porch over the front door; the yard and garden shut in by a picket fence painted white, with a brown base-board; a gravel walk leading up to the front door; the garden neatly kept, and the ripening vegetables almost ready for the gathering. The barns, as he remembered them, were painted red, with white trimmings; the horses in the stables were sleek and fat; and, to fill out the picture which he had carried in his memory, the farm fences should be in good order. The scene before him was very different, yet he quickened his steps as he thought of his mother waiting to

greet him. But here, too, was a change and a disappointment. Was this worn and weary-looking woman, with a careless air about her dress, the bright, trim mother, whose memory had always been associated with the pleasant home of his childhood? It was his mother, surely. He could never mistake the tender clasp and loving smile, sad though it might be. And the tall girl beside her — could that be Beth, his little sister? You may smile, but the thought that came into John's mind, as he looked at her in her faded calico dress, was of those handsome gowns that Aunt Fannie had put into his trunk to be made over for Beth. Presently his brother Stephen appeared; his greeting was cordial, but off-hand and not at all affectionate.

"Why didn't you let us know when you were coming? We would have had out the coach and four-in-hand. Where is your baggage, or did they pack you off without any?"

"My trunk is at the station," replied John; "I did not know whether it would be convenient" —

"For us to keep you over night?" said Stephen, laughing.

"Not just that; but whether I ought to have hired some one to bring it out, or whether you could go after it."

"What's to hinder your going yourself?" asked Stephen.

"You can answer that question easier than I," replied John.

"Shouldn't wonder if I could. I suppose I do know the ins and outs of things here better than you do," and Stephen laughed bitterly, as John thought, while he wondered at his mood.

Indoors the changes seemed even more marked and more painful than those he had noticed outside The pretty parlor, which he remembered as always carefully kept, was now dismantled and shabby, while the sleeping-rooms were more dismal and forlorn than he could have imagined it possible for them to be.

"You see," said his mother, apologetically, as John went over the house in his eagerness to re-visit all the familiar nooks, "things will wear out, and we have not had money to buy new furniture."

"But I don't understand. Aunt Fannie has never had any new furniture since I went there, and hers lasted."

"You must remember that Aunt Fannie had only you, and one boy alone will not use up things so fast as three or four. You see, I wanted the boys to have a good time, and I always encouraged their bringing their friends home with them, and they get pretty wild sometimes, and then tables and chairs suffer."

"I see," said John. He had not been at home

three hours; yet he already saw things that shocked and grieved him. He was sitting with his mother and Beth after supper, when, missing Stephen, he asked — "Where is Stephen? I ought to have helped him with his work. I did not think of it."

"Oh, he was through work some time ago; he has probably gone over to the store. I presume he thought we would not miss him; he knew I would have a great many questions to ask." And the mother tried to smile as she made this explanation.

"Where is the store you speak of?" asked John.

"At the corner; it was opened about five years ago; it is very convenient for the people around here."

"Yes, it is convenient; both as a store and as a lounging place! Especially the latter!" It was Beth who spoke, almost fiercely.

John turned to look at her. She was a pretty girl, with dark hair and eyes — well, her eyes were wonderful — large and dark and deep; when she was still, they had a far-away, dreamy look; but Frank, the youngest Heckman, described her varying mood when he said — "As soon as Beth brings her eyes back, she takes in the whole of it!" As John looked at his sister closely, he observed her dissatisfied expression. The scorn

in her tone when she spoke of Stephen and other young people of the neighborhood, had already caught his attention. Her dress was neat, though very shabby; her hair in perfect order, and her hands shapely, though they showed some work-stains. John's conclusion was, that "mother and Beth must some way have things brightened up for them."

Little by little he found out, as the days went by, that matters were even worse than his uncle had suspected. Evidently very little work was done on the farm, and everything seemed running down.

"Do you hear from Joe often?" he asked, that first evening.

"Not very often; the last time he wrote he was in Nebraska." And then the mother made haste to introduce another topic; at least, so it seemed to John.

"What became of the gray team father used to have?" he asked, one day, as Stephen drove through the yard with what seemed to this boy, used to better things, the poorest specimens of horse-flesh he had ever seen.

"Oh," replied Stephen, as John sprang up beside him on the rickety buckboard, "the nigh horse broke his leg in the woods. Joe was getting out wood, and he never would go slow, and I suppose he was reckless or careless; any way, we

had to kill the horse, and then the other went lame; but you couldn't expect horses to last forever, could you?"

"No, of course not; but I remember the grays were only six years old; they wouldn't have been old horses now."

"Well! You must have had a good memory for a youngster, to have remembered the age of a span of horses all these years! More likely they were sixteen!"

"No, indeed; you ask mother if I am not right."

"What difference does it make whether or not you are right? The horses went the way of all horses long ago, and now we have a team that nobody can kill. They are not beauties; but they are tough, and that is the main point when you want them for wear." And Stephen laughed that hard, bitter laugh, that John was learning to dread.

It seemed to this new-comer that Stephen was disappointing at every new view he had of his character. The first Sabbath after he came home, as they sat at breakfast, Stephen said—"Well, John, how will you spend the day? Will you go with me?"

Mrs. Heckman looked up quickly, and opened her lips as if about to speak; then, recollecting herself, she settled back in her chair with a little sigh.

John replied — "That depends upon where you are going. I expect to go to church, of course."

"So that's the kind you are! Well, I expected it; I knew it, in fact, when I saw that Bible lying on your stand."

"Why, don't you go to church?"

"Not much! Oh, I go once in a while when I have nothing better on hand; just often enough to keep my hand in — oh, I mean my foot in. Just to keep up with the times, you know; I don't want to be quite in heathen ignorance; but I do not take much stock in such matters."

"What do you do Sundays?"

"Oh, hang round. To-day, I'm going nutting."

"Going where?" asked John, in a tone that expressed his amazement.

"Have you suddenly lost your hearing? I said I was going nutting. Jack Swan asked me to ride over to Collins' grove with him. He said I might ask you, but I told him I guessed you were one of the other sort. He seemed to think it might be a good thing on the whole to have one such in the neighborhood; I told him it might do very well for the neighborhood, but having one in the family might make it uncomfortable for the rest." Stephen spun off these reckless sentences between sips of coffee, apparently well pleased at John's evident distress. "Now," he continued, "don't work yourself up for a martyr. You just

let me and my ways alone, and I will let you and your religion alone. I laid a dime novel down beside your Bible last night, but I asked the Bible's permission first. You see I am disposed to be perfectly fair."

"Beth," said John, after breakfast, "are you a good walker?"

"First-rate! Why?"

"Will you go to church with me?"

"Pity sakes, no! I haven't a thing fit to wear; and if I had, I shouldn't know how to act in church, it is so long since I have been."

And so John went alone. He did not mind the walk of three miles to the village; but, if the contrast between the home he had left and the one to which he had come was saddening, he was scarcely less surprised and grieved as he compared the church in which he had worshiped only a week ago with this one into which he slipped so quietly that morning. The location was opposite the village hotel; and, as no local option wave or prohibitory measure or moral suasion millennium had as yet reached the town, this was far from being a quiet or desirable place in which to worship the Lord. There was not even a bit of green in front of the church; the steps came down to the broken plank sidewalk; the building itself had once been painted, but in the long conflict with the elements, the elements had been

victorious, and only here and there little streaks and patches of paint remained to tell the story; the vestibule was dark and dingy; the audience-room uncarpeted and dusty; the October sun streamed in through windows that were neither of stained glass, nor of the best quality of unstained; there were neither shutters nor curtains to break the glare; some time, away back in the dim past, the walls and ceiling had been whitewashed, but were now smoky and flaky; everything else was in keeping. There were no ushers, and John slipped into a seat, lonely and homesick. He bowed his head, and actually the boy — this brave, strong-hearted boy — cried. Everything everywhere was turning out so different from his anticipations. He had been somewhat prepared for changes, but not such changes as he found. But I believe the boy thought that all churches were alike, and that the one he had left was the type. The tumult of his emotions almost overcame him. Could he endure the life that stretched out before him? Why had he not remained in the old neighborhood where were opportunities to earn his own living, and where homes had been opened to him? Would it not be better to go back now? There he had his work in the Sunday School; there were the boys of his set with whom he studied and worked and talked, who thought as he did, and who would be glad to have him back.

Yes, he would go back. True, there was work here, but a stronger arm than his was needed; how foolish he had been to imagine he could do anything; and sadly he asked himself — "Who am I that I should think to do this thing?" And yet, while he thus doubted and questioned, he seemed to hear that voice again, saying — "Certainly I will be with thee," and — "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand." When the invocation ended, he, too, lifted his head, strengthened and comforted; he could even join in the hymn.

There was one thing that John Heckman could do — he could sing. And so unaccustomed were they in that forlorn, dingy church to hearing such a voice that many turned to look, and John became aware that he was attracting attention.

Thinking it over afterwards, John knew that there was nothing helpful or uplifting in the words or the manner of the minister; but he had been taught both by his uncle and by his pastor that we do not go to church mainly to hear the sermon, but that our chief thought should be of the worship, and that our expectation should be of meeting our Lord; and John felt that he had met Him, almost as if he had stood face to face with his Leader.

CHAPTER III.

FACING THINGS.

"He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens."

"HOW is it, mother, that you do not go to church? You used to go."

"Yes, we always went when your father lived. But things are not as they used to be, and I have not been in so long that I have become accustomed to staying at home. Stephen thinks the horses work so hard through the week that they ought to rest Sundays."

"Yes," said Beth; "but you will observe that if Steve wants to go anywhere, he will take out the horses quick enough."

"But, Beth, you know we haven't had any buggy for the last year."

"I guess I do know that!" Beth's tone was almost fierce. "We haven't had anything to ride in since Steve raced horses with Jack Swan, and

Jack ran into our buggy and broke it all to smash. Then Steve got an old sulky that he rides around in, but the rest of us can stay at home."

John had been at home two or three weeks when this conversation took place. He had not asked many questions, but had quietly watched the run of things, and he began to feel that it was time to get at the bottom of the difficulties that seemed to hedge the family in on all sides. After Beth's last remark he was still a little while; then he asked — "Mother, how is it that with this farm, which, I suppose, is an excellent one, you have such hard times to get along?"

Mrs. Heckman hesitated. There were things which she felt she could not tell this boy; there were some things which she would keep from him if she could. Joe and Stephen should never have it to say that their mother had turned against them. Still, she knew that it was impossible to keep the true state of their affairs from John. Even if he asked no questions, he could not help seeing that the family had been having hard times. He waited now for an answer, and she said, slowly — "Well, you know it has been pretty hard times everywhere, and we have had bad luck. First, we lost the horses and had to run in debt for another team, and we have had to borrow money until we are so deep in debt that I do not know that we shall ever get out. It takes about all we can

raise to pay the interest, and we don't even keep that up very regularly."

"I see. Mother, who owns the farm?"

"It was left to me while I live."

"Then it cannot be sold?"

"No. If that had been possible, it would have been sold long ago. The boys have always felt very badly about this provision in your father's will. They both thought it would have been much better to have sold the farm and bought a house in the village. Then they could have engaged in some business they liked better than farming."

"I am glad it cannot be sold," said John, emphatically. "You will always have a home, come what will."

"Unless it tumbles down about my head," replied the mother, sadly.

Presently John asked another question. He was fast making up his mind to face the worst, and to face it with a view to overcoming.

"Mother, how much is the debt?"

Again the mother hesitated. It was hard to speak of their affairs. She could see, through John's reserve of all criticism upon the home management, that he was clear-headed enough to know that there had been sad mistakes. But as he waited respectfully for whatever information she chose to give him, she said to herself

that he had a right to know, and that he would find out sometime, and that she might as well be frank with him.

"I suppose," she said, in a hopeless tone, "that, with the interest due, it must amount to as much as a thousand dollars."

John made no sort of reply; he was stunned. How could it be possible that in six years his mother and the boys had let things run behind so as to get a thousand dollars in debt?

However, as time passed, he found out that the debt was not the worst thing he had to face. Though he was a quick-witted boy, it was some time before he took in the situation, and, as he saw that his questions disturbed his mother, he refrained from asking many, but he studied the problem in silence.

One morning he observed his mother putting wood in the stove, and was moved to ask a question which came the more naturally to his lips as, in the years he lived with his uncle, he had never seen wood burned except for kindling fires.

"Do you burn wood all the time?" was the question.

"Yes; we have a good wood lot, and we cannot afford to burn coal."

"And if you look out the window you will see our wood-pile," said Beth, bitterly.

For a moment he was puzzled; then he saw how it was. He knew there was no wood-pile there, and that it had been Stephen's habit to draw up a log of wood and chip off from it as they needed — no, not exactly as they needed, but as he was actually driven to it by hunger or cold — and Beth declared that she generally cut more than half the wood they burned.

"You don't know half how lazy Stephen is," she said.

"Elizabeth! I don't think you ought to speak so." It was the mother's reproving voice.

"Well, I need not. John will find out for himself."

After this John took a look at the wood-pile and at the wood-lot, and set himself at work to prepare wood for the coming year. It was a hard task for one unaccustomed to labor of that sort, but he soon learned how to do it, and it became easier.

Beth, watching him from the window, sawing and splitting and piling, exclaimed —

"I say it is a shame! Stephen ought to take hold and help about that wood. Instead, he is lounging away his time down at Howland's. But won't it be bliss to have a wood-pile to go to? I am so out of patience with Steve!"

"You ought not to get out of patience with your brother. I know Stephen does not like

farm-work. I think that if he could do something he likes, he would do differently."

"Humph! Do you suppose John does what he likes to do when he works away at that wood-pile? Or that I do what I like to do when I wash and scrub? I hate it! But I don't shirk."

"That is true, you don't," said Mrs. Heckman. "But some way you and John are different. Stephen is discouraged, and sinks under it; you work away, and fret at him and at your lot. But John doesn't seem to have the ambition that Stephen has to be somebody in the world."

"John is a saint — that is what he is; and Steve is a shirk! Both words begin with the same letter and have the same number of letters, but that is all the resemblance. Ambition! Mother, I do not believe any of us know what John is putting under his feet for the sake of helping us."

"But just think, Elizabeth; Stephen was all ready for college when he had to come home and take care of the farm. He was such a bright scholar!"

"You mean, come home and let us take care of him! He might stir around and earn money, and put himself through college; lots of them do."

"My child, what could we do without him?"

"Pity sakes! I don't see what we are going to do with him. For my part, I wish he would make something of himself, and prove to the world in

general and us in particular that he is good for something."

"Hush, child!"

"Mother, let me talk. Now look at that," holding up a potato, which she was peeling. "What's the reason all our potatoes are like that, about as big as walnuts, while our neighbors have fine large ones? The reason is, that ours were not hoed once, not even ploughed out. And who husked the corn? It would not have been husked had it not been for John and me. And a dozen other things went to nothing because Steve was too lazy or too discouraged to look after them."

If Mrs. Heckman had been less sad-hearted, she must have laughed at that peculiar stress of voice which Beth put upon that word, "discouraged." But, instead, she sighed; whether over Beth or Stephen, or the patch she was putting in Stephen's shirt, the girl could not determine. But she finished her potatoes in silence.

That same evening Mrs. Heckman went to bed early with a sick headache. As usual, Stephen was away, and John and Beth sat together by the kitchen fire. Thanks to John the wood-box was full, and for once the old kitchen was warm.

"I tell you," began Beth, "I can't think when I have felt warm clear through until lately; I didn't know that this old house could get warm."

"Well, those cracks that I stopped used to let in considerable cold air."

"Yes, and some way, you know how to build a fire. Isn't this cosy? I could almost forget that we are poor."

John did not make any reply; indeed, he was still so long that Beth, weary of the silence, said, suddenly —

"John, what is the matter? Has anything gone wrong? I mean anything new?"

"Not that I know of."

"Why don't you talk, then?"

"I am thinking," said John.

"I wish you would think aloud, then; I am lonesome."

"My thoughts have not very definite shape; I have been thinking a great deal lately about things here."

"Not a very taking subject, I should say," returned Beth.

"Taking or not, it is one that has to be thought of. I say, Beth, let's you and I take hold and get out of this Egypt."

"Get out? What do you mean?"

"I mean just this. Here's this big debt — that stands for old Pharaoh; this farm, all clear of debt, and fixed up as it used to be when father was alive, would be a land flowing with milk and honey. And if old Pharaoh would let

us go, we could make straight for this Canaan. See?"

"Yes, I see," said the girl, her eyes brightening as she took in the parallelism; "but Pharaoh would never let us go; he has too strong a grip upon us; he'd never let us go."

"That is what they said in the old-time story."

"But there won't be any miracles wrought for us!"

"Why not?"

"There are no miracles nowadays."

"Plenty of the sort we should want to have wrought for us."

"You haven't any rod," objected Beth.

"Haven't anything else! In that respect I am like Moses. And I am like him in some other ways, too. All the time since I came home I have been making excuses to the Lord and trying to make it plain to myself and to the Lord why I should not stay here; but He holds me pinned to the answer — 'Take this rod in thine hand.' Prof. Wells used to say that I had a 'talent for sticking.' That is my rod. It does not seem to be much of a weapon; but the Lord can make it a power just as He did Moses' poor little rod, and He can make it break old Pharaoh's power."

"But it will be a long way out," sighed Beth. "And, if we did get loose, there's that awful Red Sea and the wilderness."

"If I remember, the folks in the story didn't say a word about the Red Sea until they came to it; and as for the wilderness, do you remember how it happened that they wandered so long in the wilderness? If we look back to the flesh pots of idleness and extravagance, we may find ourselves in the same predicament; but we won't. You see we have their experience all written out to profit by."

"If you are the Moses to lead us out, what position will you give me? You know I will have to go alongside you; I do not submit to being led, very well," said Beth, laughing.

"Oh, you will have to be Aaron! You know I am like Moses in another respect, I am rather slow of speech, while you are a good talker."

"I don't agree with you; I think you are a first-rate talker."

"But I always have to think out what I am going to say, but you talk right off."

"That is a doubtful advantage; at least, mother says that if I would stop to think before I speak I would not say so many unwise things; that is, when I get mad at Steve. But, John, Aaron was a man."

John laughed. "Doesn't make any difference; this is an era of woman's power and influence."

"But let me see. What became of Aaron? It is a long time since I read the story."

"Oh, he was smitten with leprosy!"

"I remember now. He was jealous of Moses, and grumbled. I don't think I should be jealous of you; but I might forget myself and grumble. However, if I am Aaron, I shall try to profit by his mistakes and steer clear of his follies."

And so with their fancies they beguiled the hours until bed-time, trying to make themselves forget the burden. Just as they were about to say "Good-night," John said — "Say, Beth, I meant that about being Moses and Aaron."

"So did I."

As John went to his room, he thought — "I wanted to tell Beth about that sermon, and how I heard God calling to me; but I was afraid she would not understand. She is splendid to take in new ideas; but I do not think she knows about the Great Leader."

The next morning the indoor atmosphere was more cloudy than usual. Stephen grumbled about the breakfast, until Beth said — "Now see here, Steve, if you are not satisfied with what mother can provide, why don't you go to work and earn something that does suit you?"

"I'd go quick enough and earn my living somewhere, and have what I earn, too, if it were not for the fuss it would make, judging from the row there was over Joe's going; but I'll get out, anyway, before I'll stay here and starve."

"Can't make bricks without straw," said Beth, who, stealing a glance at John, saw a look of sympathy in his face. It was as if he had said — "One of old Pharaoh's burdens. If we were free from him, we could have sugar on our griddle-cakes every morning."

CHAPTER IV.

AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS.

POOR Mrs. Heckman had made a grave mistake, one which showed how much her life had been guided by her husband's stronger nature. Some women, left as she was, would have ruled their own households firmly. Many a woman has done this; many a weak, frail body has held a strong, courageous spirit that has stood bravely at the helm and guided the family bark past the shoals and rocks, through narrow channels and in the midst of storms, safely into the harbor. And then this same strong spirit has advised and directed as the young lives have set sail in their own life bark. But Mrs. Heckman was not one of these, and she had too soon and too entirely given up the steering of the craft into the hands of the two older boys. And now, because of their inexperience and stubbornness,

and the mutiny and final desertion of one, the old ship was almost wrecked.

John very often wondered why his mother had allowed herself to take, or be remanded to, a subordinate position in the management of affairs, and he would say to Beth, as they planned for the "Exodus" they meant to make — "Whatever we do, mother must be the head."

They had been unable to decide how best to approach Stephen with their plans. At length, Beth said — "I think the best way will be to go right on and plan and work without reference to him. Let mother manage him."

"Still, it seems as if we ought to take him into our confidence. It won't do to try to go one way while he is pulling the other, and may be if he knew what we wanted to do, he would pull with us."

"Not much! He will have to be made over from 'top to toe' before he and you can pull the same way."

"But, after all, it might be better to talk it over with him," persisted John.

"And get snubbed for your pains! Now you just take my advice. Anyway, I am to do the talking, so let me take my time for telling him. It will all come out right if we let things take their course."

Meantime, John, after talking it over with his

mother, mustered courage to go and see Colonel Parsons, to whom the debt was due.

"How much is my mother's debt to you?" he asked.

"What do you want to know for?" growled the colonel. "Want to pay it, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I want to pay it; not to-day, of course, but" —

"I thought likely it wouldn't be to-day."

"But, sir, I intend to pay that debt."

"You do!" The boy's tone was so quiet and so resolute that Colonel Parsons could not help it that his own changed somewhat, softening a trifle.

"Yes, sir; and I came over this morning to ask you how long you can give me to pay it in."

"That's a pretty question to ask me! You must know that I can't get hold of the farm until that youngster is of age, and there is no likelihood that there'll ever be live stock or any crops worth attaching."

"I don't know about that, sir. I live at home now, and I mean to stock the farm if I can make some arrangement with you."

"You! And who are you that you put on such airs?" And as he spoke Col. Parsons surveyed the young fellow who stood before him, modest and unassuming in manner, yet determined in attitude and in expression.

"I am Mrs. Heckman's son. I have not been at home since my father died, until lately; now I have come home to stay."

"So you said; but what of it?"

"Well, I have been thinking matters over and talking with mother, and she says we may try. So I have come over to see if I can make some agreement with you, as my mother's creditor, so I can go on and stock the farm, and make an effort to get clear of this old Pharaoh."

"Don't go to calling names, you young rascal!" shouted the colonel.

"I beg your pardon," said John, quickly; "I did not mean you. You see, my sister and I have named this debt, that won't let us have a chance, 'old King Pharaoh,' and we are just going to try to beat him out," and the boy laughed.

"What in the world do you mean?" asked the colonel.

"Why, you remember the Bible story?"

"No; I haven't looked in a Bible these forty years. I suppose my wife has one somewhere around the house, but I don't know any Bible stories."

"Well, you just read up old Pharaoh the first chance you get, and then you will see what Beth and I mean."

"Blame me if I don't! I want to find out

what this youngster has got into his head." Then in a louder tone — "Now what is it that you want of me?"

"I want a chance to pay that debt."

"Who'll hinder you if you want to pay it?"

"You can hinder me, sir, if you choose."

"Likely I'll hinder any one paying me money that they owe me! Seems to me that you must take me for a fool."

"No, sir; not at all. But I think you understand that by the terms of my father's will the farm cannot be sold until my brother Frank is twenty-one, and he is only eleven now. But, as I understand it, you can take anything we may raise or any stock we may have for the debt. I want to make a contract with you. You are to give me five years, or until I am twenty-one, to pay you. If you do this, you will be no worse off than you will be if you refuse, and you stand a chance of getting your money sooner; for, unless I can get such an agreement, of course it will be of no use to try to do anything in the way of stocking the farm, or to lay out any work on it."

"I see," replied the colonel. "You think you have the advantage. You are a sharp one; who is your lawyer? Why didn't you send him to talk this over?"

"I haven't any lawyer. I have been reading

the will and studying up the matter, and this is the way it seems to me."

"I guess you are about right. I am in a tight fix, I know; and I tell you, boy, I never expected to get a cent until the farm came into the market, and by that time I reckoned the interest would have eaten up the farm, for I manage to get only just about enough out of your mother to keep the debt from outlawing. Ten years is a good while to wait for the pleasure of turning you all out of doors, isn't it? And I guess, seeing as how you have studied it all out, I may as well fall in with your plan and take the chances with you. If I understand it, what you want is this: No matter how much blooded stock and how many fine horses and carriages you have, I am not to lay my hands upon anything for five years. Is that it? My, you are a sharper!"

"Well, if I am, do you not see that my sharpness will benefit you as well as myself?"

"But see here, young man. You are a minor; I cannot enter into any contract with you legally."

"Yes, sir, you can; at least, you can bind yourself, and that is all I want."

"You young scamp! You want to get the better of me, after all."

"No, sir; and don't you see that you will not be any worse off yourself if you give me a chance

to do something? I think that you will be willing to do that when you come to think of it, and I do not believe that you are afraid to trust me. I shall live up to my agreement just the same as if I was legally bound."

"How do you know all this if you have not been to a lawyer?"

"I studied civil government at school, and I have heard my uncle talk with men who came to the office."

"Humph! I suppose other boys have studied things, too; but fellows of your age don't generally set themselves up to wheedle old fellows like me into making contracts that only bind on one side."

"But not many boys of my age are situated just as I am," returned John, with a little tremble in his voice which the colonel noticed, but he only said —

"Well, well, you do beat all the youngsters I ever saw. Going to try to pay the debt, eh? Well, I suppose I may as well give you the chance. As you say, I will not be any worse off, for you can't eat up the land nor run away with it. Now, just how do you want to fix it?"

Hereupon the boy laid his plan in detail before the astonished man, who saw that it was certainly not unfair to himself, and that he could in no way be the loser by entering into it; and, on the other

hand, he might be the gainer. Just how much he was to gain by that simple act, he did not then suspect; indeed, he could not have understood had he been told of all the results that would flow from that morning's work.

"What about Stephen? Will he fall in with this scheme of yours?"

"I do not know; I wanted to be certain of your assistance before I talked with him. Of course, mother is pleased, or I should not have come to you. Beth will stand by me, and I think Stephen will be willing that the experiment should be made. Like yourself, he will not be hurt if it fails."

"Well, have it your way; I shall be going to the village Saturday, and you can go along, so we will have Judkins fix this up ship-shape."

"Thank you; I am sure you will never be sorry for this."

John turned away, not daring to trust himself to say another word; he had heard so much of Colonel Parsons' gruffness and hard-heartedness that he had dreaded this interview; and now that it was over, and he had gained his point, he was almost overcome.

The colonel looked after him, and said to himself — "That's a plucky fellow, any way, and he thanked me as if I was doing him a great favor in helping him to hoist that burden on to his young

shoulders. But, if he is like the rest of them, he will drop it quick enough."

It was the next day, after supper. Beth was mixing a bread-sponge while her mother washed up the dishes. Drawing her head out of the barrel, she exclaimed —

"I declare, this flour-barrel is almost empty again!"

John had just finished filling the wood-box; Stephen sat with his chair tilted back against the wall, and as Beth looked from one brother to the other, she thought — "Steve is the very picture of shiftlessness." Stephen was a great disappointment to this sister; she had been proud of him not so very long ago; but lately she was, as she said, "out of patience with him more than half the time."

John walked over and looked into the flour-barrel, and stood a moment beside the girl as she sifted and stirred with an energy that was characteristic; presently he turned toward his mother.

"Don't you think, mother, it would be a good plan to put in an acre or two of spring wheat? You know I helped Mr. Swan fan his wheat the other day, and he said he would let us have some seed wheat."

Stephen's chair came down on all four of its legs.

"Who is running this farm, any way?" he

asked, angrily. "It strikes me that the fellow that does the work ought to make the plans; it need not concern you what I sow. If I do the work I'll do the planning."

"All right," John sung out, good-naturedly, "we agree there; and as I have been doing my share since I came home, I thought I might as well do a little planning."

"Work! Winter's work isn't anything."

"No; it is only to build the fires in the morning, bring water, cut wood for the year's supply, attend to the stock, and shovel paths, besides a few other little things!"

Early in the winter John had discovered that his mother was accustomed to rise first and build the fire and that Stephen was not in the habit of getting up until called to breakfast, grumbling then if breakfast was on the table before nine o'clock; and John had soon fallen into the way of "doing the chores," as the morning and evening round of work is styled.

Knowing all his brother had done, Stephen felt the thrust a little; yet he answered, crossly—

"Well, I don't suppose you expect to come home and live upon us without doing anything, do you?"

"Oh, boys, don't quarrel." It was the mother's beseeching voice.

"No, we are not; I don't see anything to quar-

rel about. As I understand things, we have equal rights here. If I have not done anything here in all these years, neither have I cost you anything. Of course mother is the one to say what shall be done. But, now I have come home, we ought to do more work on the farm and so get ahead a little. It seems to me that, if we all take hold together, we can get out of debt and fix up things nicely."

"Out of debt! We can never do that, and there is no use in talking of it. The only way is to live along as best we can. The old farm is like a millstone about our necks; it just drags us down. If it had not been for that senseless will"—

"Stop!" It was the mother's voice again, but not beseeching as before; it was commanding, and even Stephen was startled.

"You shall not speak so of your father's plans."

"I'll say what I think," declared the angry boy.

"Not in this house, if that is what you think."

"I should like to see anybody shut my mouth," he retorted.

"You forget that the house is mine, and that you are not of age," said Mrs. Heckman, outwardly calm but inwardly frightened at herself.

"Well, I think I have some rights here," insisted Stephen, speaking a little more calmly.

"Now, let me speak," said Beth. "There

seems to be a difference of opinion as to who is the head of this household; it might as well be settled."

"Why, mother is the head, of course," said Stephen.

"Then if it is not a difference of opinion, the difficulty is in the practice, eh, Stevie?"

"Exactly! I don't want any city upstart to come in and order me around."

John's face flushed at this reference to himself, but he kept silent, having decided to let "Aaron" do the talking. Beth's cheeks were very red, and she stood waiting, as if she did not consider that last remark worthy of a reply; and Stephen went on —

"I concede that mother is the head; but the rest of us have rights, and I don't propose to be crowded out, either; and if I am not twenty-one I am old enough to have opinions, and after doing the work on the farm all these years, I ought to know best what ought to be done."

"The farm shows the work that has been done on it." Beth spoke sarcastically, and naturally Stephen flew into a passion.

"I've done more work here than I'll ever do again!"

Beth had crossed the room and was standing beside Stephen; now she laid her hand on his shoulder, saying — "Stevie, you know it won't pay

to get cross at me; you always have the trouble of getting over it, and being sorry. Now I want to say something. I am old enough to have opinions; and, as I have done some of the work here, perhaps you will own that I ought to have a right to help plan. We have been going down hill ever since I can remember; we don't seem to be able to catch on to a bush or twig anywhere to hold on by; but we just slip, slip down, and at the rate we are going, we shall soon be at the bottom. But it seems to me that if we would all take hold together and all pull together, we might get out of the slough."

Stephen laughed in spite of his ill-temper. "Say, Beth, aren't you mixing your metaphors a little?"

"Well, I'll go back to the first one. Here John joins us just as we are almost at the bottom, and he says — 'Let's climb up together, step by step, and we can get back by helping each other.' In other words, he thinks we can pay off the debts."

"Then he is a simpleton! I'll never pay a cent of my earnings to old Parsons. You might just as well throw away your money."

"I don't see how it can be throwing away money to pay an honest debt."

"Honest debt! There are precious few honest debts in this world. Poor people don't owe the rich anything. That old curmudgeon has more

than his share of property already. If we have been lucky enough to get hold of a little that rightfully belongs to us, so much our gain; I sha'n't help pay it back, and you are a set of precious fools if you undertake it!"

We must do Stephen the justice to suppose that he had actually overlooked the fact that his mother might be included in this last remark. He had fallen, it is true, but not so low as to wittingly call his mother a fool.

"Well, we are going to undertake it all the same, whether you approve or not," said the girl, nothing daunted by his rudeness.

"Just what are you going to undertake?"

"To pay Colonel Parsons the money we owe him, and to get things in better shape. We have lived like 'poor whites' long enough; mother, won't you tell Stephen about the agreement Colonel Parsons is willing to enter into?"

"Yes, I knew there was something behind all this; and, if you have no objections, I should like to be let into the secret, though I may not care to have part or lot in the matter." And Stephen turned toward his mother.

"There is no secret, and very little to tell." Bright spots on both cheeks told of a strong feeling which Mrs. Heckman was holding in check by a will which had suddenly asserted itself. "There is only this: John is quite willing to take

hold with you; and together you can do more thorough farming than you have been able to do alone, and it does seem as though we might get upon our feet again. I would be glad if we might all work together harmoniously."

"And let John be master, I suppose? Not if I know myself!" Shaking off Beth's detaining hand, Stephen banged out of the house.

"I am afraid we made a mistake in not telling him our plans sooner," said John, much troubled.

"We couldn't tell plans before they were made; and you see that even now he wouldn't wait to hear it out. It would have made no difference when we told him. I know Stephen Heckman better than you do. Any way, he will only fume around a spell and then settle down to doing nothing, as usual."

"Elizabeth!"

"Mother, I'm done. I will be patient; but that boy does try me!"

As Beth predicted, Stephen recovered from his fit of ill humor; his mother tried to interest him in their plans, explaining the nature of the agreement which Colonel Parsons was willing to enter into; but he would not be interested, declared he would not help, that it could not be done, and that the idea was "stuff and nonsense." One morning, after an evening spent at Howland's, he announced—

"If you people are going to be so silly as to turn all your earnings into old Parsons' coffers, I shall look out for myself; so I have engaged to work for Stedman this summer."

"Stedman! Oh, Stephen, how can you?"

"Seems to me you are hard to please."

"But he is such a hard man; it seems wrong to go into his employ."

"Mother, I suppose Stedman's money is as good as any, and I guess you made a mistake four years ago; you remember, that vacation before Joe went away, Deacon Jewett wanted me, and Mr. Bates advised you to let me go there; but you said that we needed money badly, and Burgess offered me a dollar a month more, so you let me go there for the sake of the dollar. You put money before morals then; and if Jim Burgess was good enough four years ago, I guess I can stand Stedman now."

Mrs. Heckman sighed; she remembered that summer, and she had long ago seen her mistake; it was not necessary that she should be reminded of it; but, knowing it was useless to expostulate, she made no response to Stephen's remarks. But Beth, who was equal to any occasion, said —

"Well, Stevie, I suppose you know that mother can collect your wages — every cent? If she says so, Mr. Stedman is obliged to pay the money to her."

"It appears to me that you are getting very wise. I presume you will study for a lawyer yet. But I can tell you that mother knows better than to do that; she knows I won't work unless I can control my own earnings."

"All I have to say is, that you need a guardian; you earned a hundred dollars last summer and fall in the canning factory, while I husked corn and dug potatoes; and you spent every cent on yourself, and then came home for mother to support you through the winter. If you go off and leave the work here this summer, I think you ought to either pay mother part of your money or else take care of yourself next winter."

"See here. Don't I buy my own clothes?"

"Yes; and you haven't had a decent thing to wear all winter."

"Depends upon what you call decent. My clothes suit me well enough, and they suited you until John came home with his broadcloth."

Mrs. Heckman and Beth set themselves to getting Stephen's wardrobe ready, and in a few days he went to fill his engagement. John was much troubled over Stephen's course; but his mother and Beth assured him that things were no worse for his being at home; on the contrary, his brother was less difficult to get along with than formerly, John's presence seeming to be somewhat of a check upon him. During the last few

days of his stay at home he was very pleasant, and did more work than he had done for a long time.

Meanwhile, the matter which the colonel had proposed to have Lawyer Judkins fix up had been arranged; and as they came away from the office, Colonel Parsons said —

"Well, I tell you, youngster, it is a long row and a tough one you have to hoe."

"I know that; but one hill at a time, and steady at it, and the longest row will be finished at last."

"How are you going to manage?"

"I don't know, exactly; I have a little money of my own; we shall have to buy a few tools and seeds, and I want to set out as many small fruits as I can. We may have to let part of the land run wild this year for want of means to work it. We must make hay enough to keep what stock we have. I think I shall work if I can get a chance, to earn money to start with another year. I thought perhaps we could get some seed potatoes and seed corn upon condition of returning with use next fall. Mother says that sometimes farmers accommodate each other that way. Do you think we could do that? We do not mean to ask favors which we cannot return."

Colonel Parsons listened to the boy's recital of his plans, saying very little in reply; but when

he had let John out of the carriage at home, he said, talking to his horse, I suppose —

"I'm a fool; I know it, and I can't help it. I like the boy's grit; I'll send him over a bushel of seed corn and some potatoes, and I sha'n't take 'em back next fall, either."

A few days afterward, he was in the granary filling a bag with seed grain, and John was holding the bag.

"Well, you young Moses," the colonel began, "I have been reading up that story you spoke of the other day; you see we have had several rainy days lately, and some rheumatic twinges warned me to keep dry, so I thought I would look up that old king. It is a pretty story, now isn't it? That fellow Moses was a plucky fellow; but then he never could have done anything without his rod; you can't ever come it over your old Pharaoh without a rod — don't you know that?"

"Oh, but I have my rod, too!"

"You have! Where do you keep it?"

"I keep it with me."

"Haven't wrought any miracles with it yet, have you?"

"Well, yes; I rather think so," replied John, thinking that if having this Colonel Parsons, who, everybody said, was such a hard man, so kind and helpful, was not a miracle, there never was one.

"My wife thought it was queer that I had

taken to reading the Bible; and to tell the truth, I felt rather queer myself — kind o' sheepish, you know. But I explained that I was looking up something you told me about. Now that is a pretty good notion of yours. Debt is a hard task-master; that part about making bricks without straw fits in first-rate. When a fellow is in debt he is tied hand and foot."

"There are lots of good stories in that book," said John.

"Yes, I suppose so; but some way I never took much interest in the Bible. I always calculated that it belonged to the priests to do up the Bible for us. My wife reads it some, and my old mother used to love it. When I read about Moses lying there in the bulrushes, it came back to me how she used to tell me the story; and if you'll believe it, I had to brush away the tears! Well, I am an old fool to be telling you this." The colonel broke off, and went back to the bin for an extra measure of seed. "There, if you have any luck you won't mind paying back the seed, and if you don't, we'll say the seed wasn't good for anything. Here, I'll give you a lift; the bag is rather heavy for you." As John drove away, the colonel went back to the granary to shut down the lids of the bins, and as he came out and locked the door, he said — "There, there, I have been and made an old goose of myself

again! I do believe that boy has bewitched me."

The spring wheat was put in the ground, other grains sown; berry bushes set out, and a few grape-vines planted. Some necessary tools had to be purchased, but right here came in more of Colonel Parsons' foolishness, as he termed every act of kindness he was led into.

"See here!" he said. "You may as well hitch on to my wheel-plough; it runs much easier than your old one." Again it was — "Don't be afraid to come to my tool-shop any time for spades or shovels, hoes or rakes; you can return the favor some time, you know." Another day, he said — "Your team hasn't been very well fed, and Patrick might as well take the grays, and give you a lift on your ploughing to-day and to-morrow. It will be all right; I presume I shall call on you before long for a favor."

CHAPTER V.

REACHING OUT.

"None of us liveth to himself."

"JOHN, do you know that this is a hard neighborhood?"

It had been a warm day for April, and even after sunset the air was not at all chilling; and the brother and sister, who had been hard at work all day, sat on the doorstep talking of their work, their plans, and their hopes. They had also been talking of their neighbors, and of matters in the neighborhood, when Beth suddenly asked the question.

"I know that it has a hard name," was John's reply.

"Something ought to be done."

"What could be done?"

"I'm sure I don't know! But my ignorance does not alter the fact."

"I don't think it would be easy to determine what could be done."

"Neither does that fact alter the other," persisted Beth, adding — "Suppose that we put our wits at work, and see if we cannot think out something."

"Don't you think, Beth, that we shall have enough to do to get ourselves out without trying to drag all the neighborhood through the Red Sea and the wilderness?"

"Well, you see, John, we shall never get far beyond our neighbors; we shall just have to take them along."

"Think so?"

"Yes. If we had never been on terms of intimacy it would be different; we can't break away from them very well; if they won't come along, and will break away from us, it will be another matter."

"What ought to be done is to overthrow that saloon. They call it a store, but it is a saloon, with a few groceries kept to draw the custom of one class."

Beth shook her head doubtfully.

"You don't think it could be accomplished?"

"I don't see how."

"But do you not think that anything which may be done to make the neighborhood more respectable will be a stone knocked out from the foundation that saloon stands upon?"

"Perhaps so. But what can we do? May be if we could arrange for some real sensible entertainments once in a while, it would help."

"We might observe Arbor Day to begin with."

"That's an idea! John, you are just splendid! Let's go down to Lizzie's and talk it over with her and Bob."

"How you do rush at things!"

"We will have to rush this, for Arbor Day is not far off." At Lizzie's they found two or three other young people, and with these and Lizzie and Bob they formed themselves into a committee to arrange for Arbor Day.

The young people generally fell in with the plan; some for the frolic of the thing, others because of the dinner which it was decided should be served at the Corners, and still others entered into the real spirit of the day; while a few of the older people opposed the scheme. The Howland brothers favored it until they learned of the dinner plan, then they joined the opposition, because they were aware that the hot coffee would interfere with their business. Beth was deputed to ask a favor of Colonel Parsons, which she did in this wise: "I am commissioned to ask if you will let us have the use of your barn to set the tables in for the Arbor Day dinner."

"My barn! Tables! For Arbor Day? I

don't know what you are talking about. What are you going to set tables for?"

"Why, for the dinner, of course."

"Who is to eat the dinner?"

"Why, the boys" —

"Yes, boys! But what boys?"

"Why, Colonel Parsons, you surely know about Arbor Day?"

"You say I do, and I hate to contradict a lady. But you will have to explain. Is that another of your Bible stories?"

Beth laughed as she replied — "I do not think you will find it mentioned in the Bible, though I should not wonder if the principle might be there."

"Now, tell me just what you are up to."

Hereupon, Beth explained to the bewildered man that Arbor Day was a time for setting out trees, and that it had been made a legal holiday in several States, that the boys of the neighborhood had planned to work together, and that the girls were to get dinner to save the trouble of going home, as well as to have a better time.

"And," she concluded, "we wanted to set the tables in your barn, as it might be too cold to eat out of doors. We thought of asking the trustee for the school-house, but as Mr. Scott is rather opposed to the scheme we decided not to ask him."

"And so you think I will be better-natured than Mr. Scott, and you ask for my barn? No, sir! Not if I know myself!"

Beth was frightened, and almost ready to cry; but she controlled herself and replied quickly — "If you are not willing, it is all right; we hoped you would favor the plan."

"Who says I don't favor it? You can't have my barn, but you can have our big kitchen and dining-room; can't they, wife?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Parsons; "I would be only too glad to have the house filled with young folks once in a while."

"But, Mrs. Parsons, there will be a lot of muddy boots to bring into the house."

"Girl, do you think my wife and I never saw any mud?"

"And so Scott don't approve, eh?" the colonel said, a little later.

"No, sir; the boys wanted to set out trees around the school-house, but he would not consent, said it was all nonsense, and that they would do more mischief digging up the turf than the trees would do good. We thought it would make it pleasanter having trees growing upon the Green; but I suppose we cannot do anything if he objects."

"I'd like to know why; but I'll see about that, and you tell the boys that they can go into the

woods and get all the trees they want, provided they do my share of the setting out."

"But, sir, suppose they want a great many? There'll be a lot of workers."

"Of course! Think I don't know how many boys there are in this neighborhood? Mercy, I've had experience enough with them, off and on, to know! Tell them to get all they can use, and I'll fix Scott. I'll go right up there now and have it out, while you and my wife arrange about the dinner." He drew on his coat, turning back from the hall to say — "Now I think of it, there's a calf fatting out in the barn that will be just prime. Veal isn't fetching anything anyway, so you may just calculate on roast veal for the crowd; hot, too — none of your cold cuts."

Once more he turned back, this time to say to his wife —

"I suppose I might as well stop and speak to Mrs. Donnelly about helping you on this important occasion? There'll be considerable to do to look after such a parcel of girls and boys."

"I am very glad you came to us," said Mrs. Parsons. "The colonel has taken a fancy to that brother of yours, and this will bring us in contact with other young people, which I think will do us both good. We live so much by ourselves that we get narrow. But if you had planned it, you could not have done a wiser thing than to

have mentioned Mr. Scott. He and the colonel don't agree first-rate — oh, there's no quarrel! The colonel don't like him, and if he is opposed to a thing the colonel will push it through."

When it became known that Colonel Parsons had taken up the scheme of the boys and girls, the idea speedily gained favor, and the committee found that they had a far larger enterprise on their hands than they had anticipated; but they had strong backers, and everything moved off smoothly. One morning Beth came home from a consultation with Mrs. Parsons with a new idea, and she went to talk with John.

"Colonel Parsons says that if you will write to Prof. Frink, and get him to come and give a lecture in the school-house on tree-planting — how to do it, and all that — he will pay the expenses. Isn't that just splendid? Patrick is going to the village this afternoon, and if you write the letter at dinner-time, I can send it to the office."

The letter was written, and Prof. Frink came and talked in an easy, familiar way to a crowded house. Such a thing as a lecture upon a practical topic in that school-house was never heard of before. The result was, that the greater number of the trees which were set out the next day lived and flourished, the directions given were so simple and plain, and so easily remembered and followed.

The tree-planting was a success, as rows and

groups of trees growing to-day upon West Hill will testify, and the dinner was a success, as those who partook will tell you if you ask them even at this late day. Perhaps we should not say that this was the beginning of better things for West Hill, for was not the beginning further back in the consecration of a young life to the work of leading out his own family from their bondage? But there are those who know nothing of that consecration, who, looking back, date the beginning of a great change from this first observance of Arbor Day.

Howland had made his store as attractive as he knew how, trimming with evergreens and flags, hoping to attract some of the boys. Although he was vexed over the big dinner, which would naturally draw away much of his custom, he did not dream how completely he was to be eclipsed for one day. The company had assembled at the entrance of the wood-lot, awaiting the coming of the colonel. While they waited, an enthusiastic young fellow proposed three cheers for the colonel. These were given with a will; then another proposed cheers for the girls who were going to serve the dinner. These, too, were heartily given, when, to the surprise of everybody, Bob Davis mounted the fence, and said — "Now I wish to offer a resolution:

"WHEREAS, The ladies have so generously offered to furnish refreshments for the day, and whereas, there will be ready at the

Green in front of the school-house at ten o'clock a can of hot coffee, and there will be dinner at one o'clock at Col. Parson's; therefore,

Resolved, That this company to a man pledge themselves not to touch beer or any other liquor, nor any tobacco, during this day. I move the adoption of this resolution."

"I second the motion," called out a voice from the crowd. Then a second reading of the resolution was called for, and a rousing shout was the response when the vote was taken. For one day Howland's was deserted.

As Beth and John talked it over that night, John said — "I was never more surprised in my life. I never dreamed that Bob was made of that sort of stuff."

And Beth said, thoughtfully — "What strikes me is, if for one day, why not for always?"

CHAPTER VI.

"OLD GOLD."

"She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands."

BETH stood in the middle of the room of the old farm-house which had been the parlor in more prosperous days, though now they were accustomed to speak of it as "the other room"; and that was all that could be said of it — it was just the other room, empty and forlorn. It was large, square, low-ceiled, with four good-sized windows high from the floor. The walls had once been hung with gilt paper, now torn and stained, while the woodwork, once white, was yellow and smoky.

"If it were not so large," she mused, "or if we had anything to put into it — if — if — I could go on a week and say 'if' at every sentence. Now what can be done without any 'ifs'? That's the question."

Presently, after considerable knitting of the pretty brows, she gave two or three emphatic nods and went quickly to find her mother.

Mrs. Heckman was in the kitchen stirring up a Johnny-cake for supper. As Beth appeared, she said, with a half-smile — "There was a time when I thought a Johnny-cake could not be made without eggs, or cream, or both."

"Well, mother, you certainly have got the knack of making them without either. But one of these days we'll have both. But now I want to ask if I may do what I please in the other room. I mean, may I fix it any way I please, or any way I can, with paint or paper or anything so as to make it a place fit to sit down in?"

"My child, where will you get the money to do anything with? It would cost a great deal to furnish that room ever so simply. I mean a great deal for us." And Mrs. Heckman sighed as she remembered the pretty furnishings of that parlor when she first began housekeeping.

"Oh, what I mean to do won't cost much! I have it all planned, and you will see what I can make out of almost nothing."

"Well, child, I am sure I do not care what you do; the room is of no use to us as it is, so do what you like. But I am afraid you will soon be discouraged about making it a respectable place for a sitting-room."

"Thank you," returned Beth, ignoring the discouraging remark with which her mother ended. "And now one thing more, — I want you to promise not to look in until I am through."

Mrs. Heckman was quite willing to promise, and then the girl began again —

"And I want to ask you about another matter. Mr. Kelly wants some help in his berry-field, and I want to learn about training the vines so as to help John with ours, and besides, I want to earn some money. Will you let me go for a few days?"

It was with very great reluctance that Mrs. Heckman consented to this. The mother's ideas were often unconsciously outraged by this energetic daughter. They might be poor, they might even live almost in rags and upon the most meagre fare, yet so long as she could keep this fair young daughter from going out to service, the mother fancied that they were independent and respectable. That clause in her petition about wanting to learn the business of berry-culture saved Beth a refusal that time. Those two young things almost took away their mother's breath with their ideas and their energy; Beth had always possessed energy enough, but only since John came had it begun to work out in a practical shape.

That very afternoon Beth paid a visit to the

attic. The first thing she laid her hands upon was a broken chair. It was one of the parlor set, cane-seated, dark wood; the top of the back broken off.

"Some glue, a piece of wire, and a rivet will fix that," she said, setting it aside. Next, she took up a chair of the same set, which had simply fallen to pieces.

"Glue!" was her laconic prescription.

The Boston rocker had two legs broken off close to the rocker.

"Jackknife, gimlet, and glue!"

An old-fashioned leaf table, one leaf broken off, the other hanging by one hinge; a set of book-shelves with broken cords, and other dilapidated furniture came in for examination, and were duly inventoried in her memory and set aside for repairs.

"Mother, do you know what a lot of furniture there is in the attic that could be mended?" This she said as she came down-stairs, covered with dust and festooned with cobwebs.

"I know there is a lot of stuff there, and I have no doubt that much of it could be repaired; but Stephen never had any knack at fixing things, and we never had the money to pay the cabinet-maker for repairs."

"Cabinet-maker! We don't need any; I can fix things myself. A pot of glue, some screws,

nails, strings, and a lot of varnish with a little gumption will work wonders and set us up finely, so that all the neighbors will think we have been refurnishing with goods straight from Paris."

Again, a month later, Beth stood in that room, and looked around, this time her face wearing a pleased and satisfied expression. It was certainly a very different-looking place. The ceiling was a clear blue-white; Mrs. Heckman herself had laid the whitewash so smoothly that Beth declared that it looked as nice as Mrs. Parsons' kalsomined ceilings. Then, true to her promise, Mrs. Heckman had kept out of the room, leaving Beth to work her own sweet will. Once the mother's heart stood still for a moment when she heard a heavy fall in the room, followed by perfect stillness; she almost broke her promise, but, recollecting herself, she called at the door —

"Elizabeth, dear!"

"Yes, mother."

"Are you hurt?"

"Hurt? Oh, no!" Then a merry laugh, and the mother smiled as she went back to her work, thinking that the child was not easily hurt.

The walls of the room were hung with pale, cream-colored paper of very small pattern, so that the effect was almost as good as though the paper were plain and heavy, though to be explicit, it cost seven cents a roll. The woodwork had

been the occasion of some discussion. Upon confiding to John her resolve to paint the room, Beth was confronted by his declaration very positively expressed — "You can never do that."

"Yes, I can. I was at Mr. Broughton's yesterday, and watched him at his painting. It seemed so easy that I asked him to let me take his brush and try; and, when I tried it, he said I did it first-rate; and then he showed me some things about it, and if I should decide to do any painting this spring he would mix my paints for me and lend me his brushes."

When she was fairly ready to commence, John thought the woodwork should be white.

"Can't afford it," said Beth, decidedly. "You see, I have studied up this thing; white paint costs. Of course, I could put on cheap white, but it turns yellow; then you have to finish off with a kind of varnish paint, and that costs like everything. Besides, it takes an expert to put on white paint; the darker the color, the less it shows if you don't do it nicely; so I am just going to put on walnut-brown, very dark."

"Oh, Beth, that will be dingy!"

"No, it won't! Just you wait until you see it with the dainty paper I am going to put on the walls."

The floor was painted in stripes — two shades of brown. That floor had cost Beth much

thought; she wanted a carpet dreadfully, and had considered the question of a rag carpet; but she knew that only long months of hard work and a considerable outlay of money would lead up to the accomplishment of that desire, hence her determination to paint the floor. Here again she was met by John's "You can never do that."

"Yes, I can. Look at what I have done already!"

"Yes; but it will be very hard work to paint a floor."

Beth looked at him with a queer little smile.

"Say, Moses, did you expect an easy time when you went into this thing? Maybe you expected to ride out of Egypt in a palace car. Had they been running them in those days, I presume Moses would have chartered a whole train of them — anyway, enough to have accommodated himself and Miriam and Aaron and their families."

Thus these two made the burden lighter for each other with merry talk, underlying which there was ever a deeper meaning, and a steadiness of purpose, and, upon John's part, an unfailing trust in the great Leader who, he firmly believed, had called him to the work he had undertaken.

The finished floor was exceedingly neat and attractive in its fresh paint, a line of gold dividing the shades of brown.

"That's really nothing but yellow ochre, the cheapest stuff in the world," said Beth, with a gleam in her eyes. "But it passes for old gold all the same. I consider that border, however, a stroke of genius."

"How did you manage it?"

"Easily enough, with pasteboard patterns; you observe it is only scallops turned different ways. It wasn't very much to do, but it gives a finish to the work."

"I should say so," was John's expressive comment.

"This is going to be the prettiest room in the neighborhood," said Beth, musingly, "and will cost next to nothing. Things will match beautifully; the chairs are dark, and so is the table you are going to mend, and the stand I am going to make out of a board and three broom-handles."

Of course, there were curtains at the windows, though of this part of her furnishings Beth had at one time almost despaired. They were not the traditional white muslin, looped back with ribbons; neither were they of cream-tinted cheese-cloth, with red or blue cambric trimmings, which material has almost crowded out the old-time muslin. It was Mrs. Parsons who came to the help of the puzzled young furnisher on the curtain question. Beth ran in to the colonel's one morning upon an errand, and, in the course of the

conversation that took place, even as she stood with one hand upon the door-knob, ready to go, she confided to her friend her perplexity about the curtains.

"I don't want either white or light-colored curtains — they ought to be brown or old gold to go with the paper and paint; but I suppose I shall bring up on cheese-cloth, that seems to be the only thing to do; but I should like it so much better if the cheese-cloth were dark-colored."

"Why, child, I'll tell you what to do. Get the cloth, and dye it to suit your fancy. There's a new kind of dye that comes put up in packages all ready to use, with the directions printed on the package. It is very easy to color with it. I colored some carpet rags the other day a dull yellow, and I suppose that is what you mean by 'old gold.' Beth, where do you get your ideas about things?"

"Everywhere," said the girl, brightly. "We have a lot of old agricultural papers that father used to take, and just the year before he left us he subscribed for a paper that offered a big dictionary if you subscribed for several years in advance, and the time hasn't run out yet, so we have that, and I get out of it a good many ideas of what is going on in the world, and of how to do things. And then, after I read about things, I notice that some one is sure to speak of them, and

that fixes the ideas. I suppose you wondered how I, a country girl, who never went anywhere in all my life, happened to know that 'old gold' is just now 'the thing'?"

"Yes, that was just what I was wondering."

"Well, I saw it in the paper, and I knew it was just what I ought to have for the curtains; but I had no hope of it, though I could not help dreaming over it a little, and imagining how they would look."

"Well, child, you shall have 'old gold,' only I fear the sun will fade them."

"But John is going to rehang the blinds; we have hunted them up, and find that they are in very good condition except for hinges and fasteners. It is a great wonder that they were not all destroyed; for they have been used for chicken-coops, and to stop gaps in the fences, and I don't know what else."

Mrs. Parsons laughed as she said — "Well, some people like to find new and uncommon uses for things, but I always like to make things do their own legitimate work. But, Beth, I want to make a proposition to you, and you must not let your pride get the better of you. It is a little thing that I can do just as well as not, and I assure you to begin with that I shall not hesitate to receive a favor from you, if the occasion should arise, as I have no doubt it will. We are all more or less

dependent upon each other in this world, and you know, too, the Book says that we should bear one another's burdens. Now I have laid away in the linen press, a pile of old, fine sheets; I intended to use them for carpet rags, but since I began this silk rug I have decided not to make a carpet, this year, anyway. We can dye them, and you can have them 'old gold,' as you call it, or brown if you choose. Suppose you have them old gold with dark brown borders? That will go prettily with your other furnishings. I will lend them to you, if you choose, and perhaps by the time I am ready to make a rag-carpet, you will be ready to put up something else. They are almost too good to cut up for carpet rags, and you may as well have a little benefit out of them first."

Long afterward Beth said — "I can never tell with what dismay I listened to Mrs. Parsons' kind offer. As she talked about dyeing those curtains, I remembered a time when my mother undertook to color some carpet rags, and I could see those sheets hung up at the windows of my pretty room, all streaks and spots, and I was ready to cry with vexation for having mentioned my perplexity."

But Mrs. Parsons went on saying — "I can dye beautifully; I learned when I was a girl, and these dyes are so simple and easy we shall have no trouble. You just come up some morning,

and we will see what can be done. I tell you, Beth, this shall be our secret; we will not tell anybody — oh, of course, your mother if you wish; but the rest of the world may wonder while they admire."

And it was exactly what they did — the neighbors, I mean — they commented and praised the effect when those old-gold curtains, without a single streak or spot, were hung at the four windows of the Heckman parlor, swaying gracefully as the breezes of early summer were allowed to sweep through the room.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

"I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."

IT was while the work of putting "the other room" in order was going on that Stephen walked in one morning, saying — "I have left Stedman's."

The only explanation he gave was that he and his employer did not agree. He settled down at home, working a little, visiting a great deal at the corner store, and grumbling at everything and everybody. Occasionally he appeared to take a little interest in Beth's plans for making the house more comfortable and home-like, and even helped her with her broom-handles; and the girl was so much encouraged that she said to John, one day — "Don't you think Stephen is a little interested in our plan, after all?"

"I don't know; sometimes I think so; if it

were not for the store, or saloon — I may as well call it that, for that is what it is. If it were not for that, I should not feel so discouraged about Stephen."

"Oh, John, it is not like you to get discouraged. Now I do not expect Stephen to turn right about and fall in with us all at once, as they do in books; but I do believe that if we keep right on doing all we can to make home pleasant, we will win him over after a while. Now just as soon as we get settled, I should like to give a party."

Both laughed outright at her brother's expression of dismay.

"Oh, I mean a little tea-party. I should like to ask Rob and Lizzie, Mame Howard and her brother; she is a nice girl, and her brother is one of the saloon boys that Stephen goes with."

"But do you think it is right to encourage such fellows by associating with them?"

"Encourage them in what?"

"Why, in their ways — going to the saloon, playing cards, and all that."

"Why, no, I want to discourage them in such ways, by showing them that we can have good times at home."

"But mother says that the furniture became so banged up because the boys always act so rude when they come here."

"But they won't be rude this time; mother will be in the parlor and at the tea-table, and I shall have several nice girls to help entertain them."

"But can we afford to give a party?"

"I think so, such as I mean to have. Just a simple tea will not cost much, and we can better afford it than we can afford not to try to do something."

"All right! If that is your scheme, go ahead. I did not know but your plan might embrace a caterer from the city, with a band of music."

"What nonsense!" Then they both laughed, and John went off to his work. Some way it was easy to laugh when he talked with Beth; and he went on, either to himself or to the horse he was harnessing.

"Now that girl has real sense. And she makes things look cheery, too. She is a good Aaron."

"Stephen, I wish you would whittle to some purpose!" Beth said, one evening, when Stephen sat upon the door-step, idly whittling a pine stick.

"Do you want a wooden idol whittled out?" asked John, who was trying to mend a broken hoe-handle with a piece of wire. "I remember that the Israelites that went wandering up and down the land fell to worshiping idols. Better take care."

"Oh, she wants me to carve a Clytie or a

Minerva, or something of the sort, to fill the niche in the drawing-room."

"You are both quite too nonsensical. What I want is very practical and very simple. I wish you would make me a pair of knitting-needles."

"Oh, is that all? How large do you want them?"

"Eighteen inches long, and about as large as my little finger. Now don't make a mistake and use your own finger for a measure! They must be made of some sort of hard, tough wood and very smooth."

"All right! You shall have them right away."

And now what a miser the girl became! Not a strip of cloth escaped her — black, white or colored; all were carefully hoarded, and washed, pressed, sorted, and cut into strips, and as if by magic transformed into rugs, pleasing to the eye and soft to the feet. One was spread before the table and another in front of the couch. Beth and Stephen had contrived that couch; he made the frame, upon which she had used some of her wonderful brown paint. The head-rest was the result of their joint effort of brain and hand, and was voted a complete triumph of inventive genius. Some old ticking, which was found stowed away in the attic, when cleansed and stuffed with hay, served for cushioning; then came the question of a covering for this remarkable piece of upholstery.

This was still an unsolved puzzle when Stephen thought to ask — "What are you going to cover that thing with?"

"Nothing, until I get some money to pay for cloth to put on it. There is a kind of goods they call 'cretonne'; I have never seen any of it, but I think from the description it will be the right thing. I suppose it is a kind of thick cotton print; and if it comes in quiet patterns and colors, it will be just the thing."

"Indeed, you are very modest in your aspirations! I supposed you would expect to have satin or velvet." This Stephen said with what sounded very like a sneer; and Beth thought sadly how little he cared, after all, for their plans and contrivances and economies. But she repented of this thought when, a day or two later, Stephen came home from the village, and tossing a parcel upon the table he said — "There, how will that answer for a covering to your divan?"

Beth's fingers very quickly undid the package, and as she caught sight of the contents, she exclaimed — "How very pretty!"

"Do you like it?" The question was asked in a relieved tone. "I thought it was dreadfully sombre, like a funeral, almost; but I concluded you were fixing up for something mournful with all that black paint, so I ventured to bring this along."

It was a piece of cretonne of quiet tint and delicate pattern; Beth herself could not have chosen anything more to her taste, and, to her further delight, the measure was ample, leaving enough for a pair of box ottomans.

"I suppose you won't let a fellow bring anybody over for an evening, now you are fixed up so fine?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! What do you suppose I have been doing all this for? I wanted you and John to have a place to ask company into, as well as a pleasant sitting-room for our home evenings."

"It makes the rest of the old house seem more forlorn than ever," remarked Stephen.

"I know it," returned Beth, with a sigh; "but I cannot do any more at present; if mother will let me pick berries for Mr. Kelly, perhaps I can earn money enough to fix up one or two rooms."

"Beth, don't you spend any of your money for yourself?"

"For myself? What do you mean?"

"Why, for candies and gimcracks, such as other girls have."

"No! I cannot remember when I spent any money for candies; and I should feel real mean to spend anything for myself that was not absolutely necessary, when so many things are needed in the house."

I think that Stephen Heckman was thoroughly

ashamed of himself as he contrasted Beth's unselfishness with his own idle and spendthrift ways. He could not help remembering that the few yards of cotton goods which he had furnished for the covering of the couch was his only contribution to the needs or comfort of the family out of what might be considered as his own earnings, and this looked very small to him beside Beth's sacrifices. He had always argued that any money which he might earn away from home was his own to do what he pleased with, and he never thought of using it for the benefit of the family. He did not seem to care about having any further conversation with his sister just then, and he walked off, trying to rid himself of the unpleasant train of thought which her words had started. He could not help reflecting that, had he been half as self-sacrificing as she had shown herself, things might have been much more comfortable at home. Presently his mood changed, and he relapsed into his habitual careless and reckless humor. "Who cares?" he said. "She does what pleases her, and I do what pleases me; that's fair enough, I'm sure — ought to satisfy anybody's conscience." Then he went on to his usual haunt and parted with his last dollar.

At length everything was done, and Beth was in full tide of talk over her plans for a tea-party. Mrs. Heckman objected that they had not dishes

enough to serve company. Beth was dismayed; she had not thought of that. John laughingly said — "Beth thinks that a parlor is all that we need to make life sweet." A little later, he said — "Beth, I was intending to buy a birthday gift for you, but I have been thinking that perhaps you would rather have a few dishes than what I was going to get, so here is the money. You can get what you choose."

Never was any housekeeper more delighted with a set of the finest Dresden china than was this young girl with the dozen cheap earthen plates and half a dozen cups, with as many plain tumblers. By various contrivances and sacrifices, all other hindrances were overcome. The original list of guests included but seven young people of the neighborhood; but Stephen asked that two others, Jack Swan and Dean Wilson, be added to the number. Mrs. Heckman shook her head over these two names; but Beth said —

"Mother, we'll just have to have them or give up the whole thing; and I guess it will be all right, with so many of us to keep things toned down. If only they will leave their cards at home for that evening; you know they are the two of Stephen's friends who always play when they come here, and Jack Swan always has to have his glass of cider. If only we can manage

to keep these things out — you know John never stays in the room with cards or cider!"

"Yes, dear, I know; but do not worry, just hope for the best." Beth remembered afterward that she thought in the midst of her perplexity how unusual it was for her mother to speak hopefully; it was generally the daughter who had to cheer and encourage. Mrs. Heckman was not considered a very positive woman. It had been so seldom in these later years that she had asserted herself, that neither her neighbors nor her children realized the strength that lay behind her usual passive demeanor. Beth might have remembered a very few times when her mother had declared — "This thing shall not be"; but these occasions had been rare indeed, and had cost the woman an almost superhuman effort. John had said very little about the card-playing or about the cider which Stephen and his associates drank. Indeed, there had been much less of it since he came home; for, with all his sneering at John's ways and opinions, Stephen felt rebuked and uncomfortable in his presence, and had less often asked the boys in for a frolic. The mother, appreciating the efforts that John and Beth were making to bring the family up out of their poverty, felt that the time had come for her to take a different stand in her own home. So it was that, in the silence of the night-time, after a long and

painful struggle with her timidity and her established habit of yielding, she resolved that her home should not be, as it too often had been, a place of wild revelry. In her distress she cried out — "Father in heaven, forgive me! In my anxiety to keep my boys at home, I have allowed them to do things the right of which I questioned, and I have gained nothing, but have lost much."

She said nothing of her resolve, not even when Beth said again and again — "I do so hope nothing will happen to spoil it all."

I should like to tell you all about that supper; but I may not risk turning this story into a cook-book, so I will only hint at the fluffy biscuit and the delicious coffee, and say that though everything was very plain and simple, although there was only one kind of cake and no ices or confectionery, yet everything was so fresh and nice, and so daintily served, that it seemed really an elegant entertainment.

"Beth Heckman can do the most with next to nothing!" Mame Howard whispered this to the young lady by her side at the tea-table. "Now that centre-piece is nothing in the world but chick-weed and cinnamon roses; but it is every bit as pretty as some I've seen from the florist's. I tell you, she is a genius!"

"Yes, I think she is a splendid girl. That John is a nice fellow."

"Yes, though he is not so good-looking as Stephen."

"You know the old saying?"

"What — 'Handsome is that handsome does'?" asked Mame. "Yes."

"The boys of this neighborhood can none of them lay any claim to great beauty on that principle. Just wait until this new-comer has been here a year or two. He will be like all the rest."

Mame sighed as she spoke; perhaps she was thinking of her own brother, a bright young fellow who, within the last year or two, had seemed to be going down-hill. This bit of conversation had been carried on under cover of much talk and laughter on the part of others; but now there was a lull in the hilarity, and the two girls ceased their private chat and joined in the general conversation.

In the lingering twilight of the summer evening they left the tea-table and repaired to the parlor. Mrs. Heckman, going softly about the kitchen doing up the work, smiled as she had not done in years, as she listened to the cheerful voices that floated out to her through the half-open doors. Presently, as she was putting the finishing touches to her work, Stephen came into the dining-room with Jack Swan, Dean Wilson and young Howard.

"What is it? Do you wish for anything,

Stephen?" Her tones were calm and even; but, had Stephen looked at his mother, he would have seen an unusual brilliancy in her eyes and a flush upon her cheeks.

"Nothing but a light and the use of the table. We thought we would withdraw from the crowd and have a little game by ourselves," at the same time producing a pack of cards.

"Oh, Stephen, I wouldn't to-night."

"Why not, I should like to ask?"

Mrs. Heckman thought of saying that Beth might not like it, as it was her company; but she straightway put aside the idea of letting it rest upon her daughter's shoulders, and determined to adhere to her resolution to take a stand, so she said — "I would much rather you would not play."

"Well! Seems to me this is a new wrinkle. I suppose Lady Beth or my pious brother has put down the law; but I assure you" —

"Stephen!" Something in the mother's voice or manner silenced the young man, and she went on — "Perhaps I ought to have spoken before of a resolution I have made; but I hoped that there might be no occasion for speaking. I have yielded to your wishes too long in this matter. I ought to have taken the stand before; but for the future, I most earnestly hope that neither child nor guest will ask to be allowed to play cards in my house. I owe your friends an apology."

"Mrs. Heckman, we are the ones to apologize," interrupted Dean Wilson. "If I had thought of your having any objections, I would not have proposed this, for I was the one to propose it. I am very sorry."

Stephen suddenly made a move, and taking his hat, he said — "Come on, boys! Let's go where we can do what we like without interference." And he went out of the house, followed by Jack Swan. Young Howard slipped back to the company in the other room. Dean stopped a moment to assure Mrs. Heckman that he would not have thought of going contrary to her wishes in the matter. While he still stood talking with her, Stephen came back to the side-door, and said — "Come on, Dean."

"No, I think I'll stay here. You know I was invited to spend the evening, and I am going to do it."

Finding his persuasions of no avail, Stephen took himself off, and Dean returned to the parlor with Mrs. Heckman. Beth had been a little uneasy at the withdrawal of the four young men, and now looked up wonderingly; but she had no suspicion of the scene which had just taken place, and so her evening was not spoiled.

Dean Wilson was one of those young men of whom we are ever thinking in the words of the old refrain — "It might have been"; though he

was still young enough for it to be said — "It might be." There were possibilities in the young man, yet he was recklessly throwing them away. What cared he for possibilities, so long as there were before him certainties or even probabilities of a "good time"? He had a certain native grace and courtesy which, among the people of the neighborhood, passed for less than its worth; indeed, so lightly was the gift held that the young fellow had grown chary of its use, and often affected a roughness which was foreign to his nature. Like Stephen Heckman, he had considerable intellectual power which he was letting run to waste; he was more industrious than Stephen, perhaps only because he was still under the control of his father, in that respect; but he was counted throughout the vicinity as a wild, reckless young fellow. And this was the young man who presently left Mrs. Heckman's side, and joining the group on the door-step, seated himself beside her bright young daughter. And with a sudden apprehension at her heart, the mother wondered if, after all, she might not have made a mistake in yielding to Stephen's request, that Dean Wilson be among their invited guests.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE QUESTION OF TRIBUTE.

"Thou shalt make no covenant with them."

STEPHEN was sauntering along the road toward the Corners when he met his brother Frank trundling a cart.

"Say, Frank, don't you want to go with me?"

"Where?"

"Just down here to the Corner."

"Are you going to Howland's?"

"Maybe."

"Then I can't go," said Frank.

"I'd like to know why you can't?"

"Because mother does not like to have me go there."

"But you have just been there after groceries."

"But mother always tells me not to stay when I go there after things."

"That's all right when you are alone, but you

can go with me. There's to be a show there to-night and some music — a fellow with a banjo; you never heard a banjo, did you?"

The little fellow hesitated.

"Come along," urged Stephen.

"Wait until I go and ask mother."

"Nonsense! Come along! I can't wait all night. The music will be over."

"But I must take these things home first."

"Well, you just slip in, and put them on the kitchen table and run right back; don't say a word to anybody, and they will think you have gone out to play, and we will get back before they will miss you. Hurry up, now."

It seemed as though Satan had set himself to entrap the boy thus early, and had put his own brother to the work; but He who guards the lambs of the flock was watchful, too. Stephen grew tired of waiting, and went on, saying —

"I might have known that the little dunce would not know how to manage it. He is a cute little chap sometimes, and I thought he might as well have some fun; but I suppose John has spoiled it for this time."

The way the plan came to naught was this: Beth's friend Lizzie had halted at the gate in a carriage, and was saying —

"Oh, Beth, I am so sorry! I forgot that book I promised to bring up; I wanted you to read it,

and I must send it back to the library in a day or two."

"Never mind," said Beth, consolingly.

"I do mind. But here's Frank. Can't he ride down with me now, and run back with the book? There will be time before dark."

There was no help for it. And indeed, the prospect of a ride was quite a recompense for the loss of the show, banjo and all. However, he hesitated a little, at which Beth wondered, and after he came back she thought to ask — "Frank, didn't you want to go down with Lizzie to-night? I thought you acted as though you didn't quite like the plan."

"Yes, I wanted to go, only" —

"Only what?"

"Stevie was waiting for me."

Then Beth drew out the whole story, how Stephen had coaxed him, and how he was going to slip away without telling anybody of his intention.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Beth, "I wish that saloon would burn up or sink, or something."

It was a hard task set that mother to explain to one boy why he might not go where the elder boy wished to take him, without destroying the little fellow's confidence in his brother, and this she dreaded to do; and then Frank said —

"But, mother, I go there very often for things,

and sometimes I have to wait a long time; I don't see why it would be any worse to wait just because I wanted to than to wait because I had to. If I got drowned on purpose, or because I fell in the water and couldn't get out, I'd be dead all the same, wouldn't I?"

She knew not just what to say — what she did say was —

"Dear child, it is hard for you to understand things now; but you must try to believe that mother knows best what is right, and remember to obey her."

When Frank had gone to bed, John asked —

"How long has there been this store, or saloon, or whatever it may be called, here on the Hill?"

"I don't remember just when he began to sell liquors. Mr. Howland opened a store about five years ago, and it really seemed quite a convenience, especially for people who have no horse; at this distance from the village it is often difficult to get what is needed, and the place is handy for the people who bring their milk to the factory."

"I can easily understand that. It is certainly very convenient to have a store here."

"At first he kept only groceries and provisions; after awhile he sold new cider, then lemon beer and ginger pop; then he took out a beer

license, and for two years he has sold whiskey freely."

"And you always trade there?"

"Yes. You know at first we went there because it was handy for us, and afterward, when he took out a license, Joe and Stephen said it would offend Mr. Howland if we did not trade there; so we kept on, and it seemed as if we were obliged to, it being as I say, so difficult to get things from the village."

"Mother, I wish we need not buy anything there; I will never enter a place where liquor is sold if I can avoid it."

"I know it is a bad place; I believe it has done more to ruin the boys of this neighborhood than anything else. Boys like to be together, and it was a handy place to drop into; Mr. Howland was always pleasant and made every one welcome, and one need not drink if he did go there to spend his evenings with the rest."

"But I suppose the most of them get to drinking after awhile?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

John's temperance principles had grown and strenghtened during the years that he was under his uncle's care and training, and he was stanch and true and consistent. Neither were these characteristics confined to the temperance question. One of his uncle's professional friends offered

him a ticket to a circus that was accompanied by the collection of animals, so often the net spread for unwary feet. Upon being pressed for the reason of his polite refusal of the intended kindness, he said that he never attended entertainments of that character.

"But," said his friend, "it is a fine show of animals, and you want to see them."

"Not if I have to see them in connection with a circus."

"But you will miss them entirely then, for the animals always accompany a show of that character."

"Well, I will wait, and sometime I may be able to visit the Zoölogical Gardens."

"But that will involve an expensive journey."

"Yes, sir; I know that. But Uncle John has often told me that consistency is sometimes expensive."

Having grown up with this idea that no price is too great to pay for a clear conscience, and that to be free from complicity with evil and to be consistent is worth the price, cost what it may, it was no wonder that John Heckman was not willing to patronize Howland's saloon grocery, though the carrying out of the opposite course might be attended with great inconvenience.

"I don't want to go there any more than you do," said Beth, as they talked it over. "But I do

not see how you are going to manage. If we had a buggy it would be different; but situated as we are, I don't see how we can manage it."

"We'll have to! Moses would never have got away in the world if he had been all the time saying — 'I don't see how we are going to manage.' If the Lord says — 'Have nothing to do with this thing' — and you and I believe He does — it isn't my business to make a way in the desert. We must just follow the directions as they followed the pillar and the cloud."

"John, how in the world did you ever learn so much Bible?"

"Just as we learn anything — by studying it. You see it was like this: The stories of those old heroes of Bible times interested and fascinated me, and I used to talk them over with Uncle John, and he would say that was like such and such a circumstance or situation in our life; and I suppose that is where I caught the trick of fitting everything to our own affairs, which seems so queer to you. But it makes the Bible more real, more as if it belonged to us and our time; it fits right into our lives, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see."

"I remember a sermon which Mr. Williams preached; Mr. Williams was our pastor, you know. He said that whenever we made a league with an evil because it was convenient, we were

like the Israelites when, instead of driving out the kings, they conquered them and made them pay tribute. Now, don't you see, if we go to Howland's because it is convenient, we make evil tributary to us and the tribute we take is 'our convenience'?"

"Well, that is so. But I never thought about it that way, and I don't believe mother ever did. The most I thought about it was that I hated to go there because there are always so many hanging about, and then I knew it was a bad place for Stephen, and I was afraid that Frank would get to going there, too."

"I don't see how the people around the Hill endure to have liquor sold right here in the neighborhood."

"Oh, Howland pays a heavy tribute to others as well as to us!" returned Beth, quickly, showing that she had caught the thought.

"John." This after a long silence.

"Well?"

"Wouldn't it be a grand thing if we could do something to stop liquor-selling on West Hill?"

"Yes, but we couldn't."

"John Heckman! Are you asleep or crazy?"

"Neither, I think. Why?"

"Because something must be the matter when you say a thing that ought to be done can't be done."

"But, Beth, I really don't see much chance of success in fighting this evil. Uncle used to say that it is so deeply intrenched in the laws and in the hearts of the people, that a mighty army will be required to overthrow it, and what are you and I against it?"

"We haven't got to fight the whole evil, only this little bit of the enemy's army. Isn't there something in the Bible to fit in there, something about every man's work in front of his own house?"

"'Every one over against his house.' But, Beth, you know there is a liquor league, and when one little country saloon is attacked, they put their whole force, if needed, to crush out the effort."

"Yes, I know that." There was a whole volume of doubt in her tone, at which her brother wondered; but as she did not say anything more, he returned to his reading. She sat for a long time with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes wearing that far-away look; then she spoke again —

"John."

He turned toward her, laying down his paper at once, and waited.

"You remember when they blew up Hell Gate, the match was applied by the hand of a little girl?"

"Yes; I remember reading about it."

"And it blew up all the same, you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't suppose we could blow up the saloon, but we might be the ones to touch it off. See?"

"No, I don't see. In the case of Hell Gate, the work was all done — the tunnel dug out, charges of dynamite and gunpowder put in, wires laid — then the little girl touched the key of the battery and off it went."

"Just so! Do you suppose the little girl knew all that had been done? I think I have heard that she was a very little girl, just a baby; but she did just what her father told her to do. Now how do you know but the time to touch off the moral battery that is to blow up the saloon is very near? How do you know but the Lord has everything ready? Seems to me, that if I were on such intimate terms with Him as you are, I would ask Him about it, and keep watch and stand ready to touch it off if He said the word."

CHAPTER IX.

STEPHEN A CUMBERER.

"Behold these three years I come seeking fruit."

THAT Stephen Heckman was a sore trial to his family must be evident to every one who has followed our chronicle thus far. The dreadful uncertainty as to Joe's whereabouts and welfare was not more trying than the knowledge of the course this second son was pursuing. Beth lost all patience, while John was puzzled and distressed, and sometimes greatly annoyed and vexed. While he worked most steadily, Stephen did next to nothing upon the farm, yet was continually thwarting John's plans and asserting his right, as the elder brother, to manage their affairs. It was often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to prevent him from spending the little money that was coming in, but more and more Mrs. Heckman was asserting herself and taking

her place as the head of her family. How could she do otherwise, with John and Beth continually referring to her and paying her the deference and honor which was her due, and which she had never received from the older boys? Yet the poor mother was always ready with excuses whenever Beth complained of Stephen. She would say —

"But you know, Elizabeth, that Stephen would be different if he could have a chance to do something that he has a taste for. It is being obliged to give up his studies and being tied down to the farm, which he hates, that has made him so reckless. If we could only get along without him, and he could get into some other business, I think he would do better."

"But, mother, he tried it in the spring, and here he is back again doing nothing."

"But he did not get a good place, and the work was not at all congenial."

"I suppose he thinks that the work John and I do is congenial! If I gave up for that reason, I should sit with folded hands the most of the time."

"Really, Elizabeth, I think you are too hard upon your brother. He is kind-hearted. He told me the other day that if he had stayed at Stedman's, he intended to have brought home part of his earnings."

"He might have brought home his money, but he would have been sure to spend it at Howland's," said Beth, bitterly.

Listening to such conversation as this between his mother and sister led John to make a resolve. If this were true; if, as his mother said, Stephen's disappointment had made him bitter and reckless; if his distaste for farm life had so nearly ruined him, so crushed out his ambition, could not something be done to change all this? Now that this strong younger brother was there to put a shoulder to the wheel, why should not Stephen strike out for himself, if he wished to do so? He was not yet twenty years old. What was to hinder him from working his way through college as many others have done? True, three years of careless living had undone much of the work of his school days, and he had formed habits which it would be hard to shove off. In his present state of mind, it was hardly possible that he would accept release from the responsibilities of the farm if it were offered him. Then again, if he were to carry his idle and spendthrift ways, his drinking and gambling habits, into another sphere of life, he could not help making a failure of it. John saw all this, and yet, after much thought and much taking of counsel with the Great Leader, he determined to watch his opportunity and speak to Stephen. One afternoon,

when they were at work together, Stephen himself opened the way by saying —

"John, you do this as if you liked it."

"Well, I don't — and I do." Then, as Stephen looked for an explanation — "Well, I don't like it in itself, but there are certain results to be worked out which I do like."

"You have more faith in the results than I have," replied Stephen, relapsing into moodiness. "I feel as if a whole mountain lay on top of everything we undertake to do. It was a great mistake, my going to school just long enough to get a taste for something besides farming."

"Stephen," began John, after a little pause, "I want to talk to you about something."

"Fire away! You generally aim straight, and I suppose I'll get knocked over; but I'm flat, any way."

"I heard mother saying, the other day, that you were a first-rate scholar when you left school."

John stood in what was an unusual position for him, leaning upon his hoe, while Stephen was striking somewhat random blows with the one he held. John did not know what to say next. There were two reasons why it was hard to say what he meant to. One reason was, it would be to put still further away from him all hope or thought of a college course for himself, and the

other reason was, it was not easy to talk with this brother. He was such an uncertain individual, one never knew in what spirit his remarks would be met. He waited now to see what encouragement he might receive to go on. At length Stephen assumed a position similar to his own, and the two stood looking at each other.

"Well, is that all you have to say?"

"And she said you were all ready for college."

"Humph! I guess those are phrases that mother has got up for use when she wants to praise her boys. I heard her say the same thing of you the other day. Well, old fellow, I suppose we will go about the same time. There seems to be a fine opening for us; though, on the whole, I think I will take a trip to the moon instead; I could do one as easily as the other."

"Stephen, I have something to say. Though I am slow of speech, nevertheless it may be worth your hearing."

"All right, go ahead," and Stephen assumed an air of mock seriousness and attention.

"I want to ask a question or two" —

"Oh, you want information! I fancied you had some to impart."

"Perhaps I may have after I get a little more to put with what I have already."

"Going to make a mixture? Don't give me a problem in allegation; I never liked that rule.

They understand it pretty well at Howland's, though."

"I wanted to ask how you expected to get through college if Joe had stayed on at home and you could have kept on at school. Were things going on so well that you expected mother to pay your bills?"

"Well, I wonder, I do wonder if you think I am the one who has done all the running behind here. That's complimentary; pay my way! Mother pay my way with Joe managing things! Not much! I expected to work my way through, and I could have done it. A self-made man was what I meant to be. I tell you, John — no, I won't tell you anything. I don't want to talk about it."

"But I do. Now, if three years ago you thought you could work your way through, why can't you do it now?"

"Are you crazy? I look like a college chap, don't I? Come now, don't I?"

"Not exactly; but so long as you are not one as yet, I do not see what your looking like one or not looking like one has to do with the question. And I ask again, Why not start right off now and do what you intended to do three years ago, when your plans were broken off by Joe's going away?"

"Now, John Heckman, you do not know what

you are talking about. In the first place, if I wanted to do it ever so much I could not."

"Why not?" The question was put quietly, but in a tone that expressed great doubt of the truth of the last statement, and Stephen became convinced that, crazy or not, John was honest and was waiting for an honest answer.

"In the first place, three years ago I could have commanded a good position where I might have earned enough to pay my way; but who wants a shabby loafer like me? Oh, I know it! I am a loafer; that is what they call me. And now I'll tell you the plain truth. I expect to loaf away the rest of my life. On the whole, I rather like it."

"Stephen, I wish you would not talk so. You could soon fit yourself for any position you choose."

"It isn't worth while. There's three years lost, and I'm twenty years old. It is too late to do anything if I wanted to."

"And in five years you will be twenty-five years old, whether you 'loaf' away the time, as you say you expect to, or whether you turn about and make something of yourself. Time won't stop for you in either case. And it seems to me that what you are at twenty-five depends upon yourself and the use you make of the years between now and then. I have read that every man is

the architect of his own fortunes, and I guess it is true. But, Stephen, I think you are building your fortune upon a shaky foundation" —

"Quite a sermon, I declare!" was the bitter, sarcastic interruption. "But I don't want to hear any more."

Stephen's mood had changed from the good-naturedly-reckless to one of bitter anger.

"I did not mean it for a sermon," was the response, in the same quiet manner to which John had held himself throughout the conversation. "I only wanted to tell you that if you thought you could do better for yourself by going back to your studies and working through a course of study, I could manage alone, and maybe by and by we could help you some."

If Stephen could have known what it cost his brother to say that! But he was too angry to see the self-sacrifice embodied in that remark, or to understand the bitterness of John's Marah; and even if he had not been angry, I think that at that period he was too selfish to have understood it. If he had thought of a Marah at all, it would have been his rather than another's.

He threw down his hoe, and said fiercely — "I see your scheme — right through it! I am not a fool, if I am a loafer It is a plan to get rid of me. You can kick me out any time without getting up schemes that sound brotherly and

self-denying and all that. You need not trouble your head with thinking out plans for my benefit; you might overdo and have brain fever. I would have gone long ago, only some way I cling to mother. She felt so badly about Joe's going off that I fancy she would cry a little over me. But I may come up missing some fine morning. The fact is, you and Beth manage mother about as you like, and I do not suppose she would miss me very much, after all."

"Stephen!" The tone was one of distress. "Why will you misunderstand?"

"Oh, I understand! I am not so thick-headed as not to be able to take a hint. And now, if you are through with your suggestions, I'll be off. Don't bother your head with any more philanthropic schemes for my benefit. Better turn your attention to the heathen."

John was more discouraged and sorrowful than ever before. He had blundered sadly, having failed to put the matter before Stephen in the light he meant to. Perhaps it would have been better had he persuaded his mother to talk with Stephen. Indeed, now that he thought it over, he was sure that would have been the wiser plan. He being the younger brother, naturally the elder would resent anything that might be construed into interference or dictation. Yet he had only done what he thought he ought to do. Why had

he so miserably failed? In the dark days that followed closely upon this hour John often wondered how the Lord was going to use this mistake. It did not seem to him possible that it could work out any good to any one; yet there was the promise.

Stephen went directly to the stable, led out and saddled one of the horses, and, mounting, rode away — rode as if for life; and I think he almost wished he were riding out of life.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN'S MARAH.

"They could not drink of the waters of Marah."

ALMOST beside himself with rage, Stephen urged his horse forward. Alternately he set his teeth and raged inwardly, or broke suddenly into wild, audible ravings. He raved at John, at Beth, at Joe, at fate, at everything and everybody excepting Stephen Heckman. In his way of putting it that young man was a most cruelly treated individual. If he were not all that he ought to be, it was through no fault of his own; circumstances had made him what he was; had he been given half a chance, he might have been somebody; but it was too late now. The absurdity of the thought that at twenty it was too late to turn about and make a man of himself did not occur to him.

He rode on for several miles at breakneck speed, unmindful of his weary horse. At length,

the strength of his passion having spent itself, he turned homeward, riding more slowly. He seemed in deep thought, as if he were making up his mind what to do; and presently he said through his teeth — "I'll do it. I'll cut loose from them all this very night! They may just get along the best way they can, and I will take care of myself! I shall not run away; but I will go in and tell mother that I am going, and I'll go!" It might have been a tender thought of his mother that caused him to waver in his determination, but I think it was the recollection of the fact that he had no money, that settled the matter, for he was not quite ready to take up the rôle of a "tramp." And after another brief period of silence he struck his horse into a gallop, saying with even more determination than before — "I'll not go. I will stay at home and hold on to my rights. I will let John and Beth know that I am master, and they will have to do as I say."

How it happened he could never tell; old Prince was generally surefooted, yet some way he suddenly stumbled and fell, carrying his rider with him. Stephen was conscious of a quick, sharp agony, then — how long afterward he did not realize — he felt himself lifted, and heard voices that sounded as though they came from a great way off; it seemed like words spoken through a tube.

"Carefully. I think this leg is broken."

"He is coming to. There! He has fainted again."

A neighbor had seen the fall, and, summoning aid, sent messengers to tell the family and bring a physician. In the gathering twilight they carried him home. They thought he was unconscious, as indeed he was the most of the time, and they were not very cautious in their remarks. Stephen heard the low question of one who came up later —

"Had he been drinking?" and the reply —

"I do not know; I have not detected any odor of liquor; but if he had been, the fall has sobered him, I reckon."

Stephen remembered that question long; in the weary weeks that followed, it came back to him again and again, and his cheeks would flush with shame just at the memory. Was this, then, the reputation he had made for himself? Well, it was only another evidence that he was right in his belief that it was too late to make anything out of his life. He had gone too far on the down-hill road to think of turning back now. He never once acknowledged that it was of his own will that he had taken this downward course; he always argued that he had been dragged down by circumstances.

The physician who came in response to the

sudden summons found a broken leg and a few bruises, but no serious internal injury.

"Young man," he said, "you may be thankful that you got off as well as you did."

"I don't know who I am to thank!" growled Stephen.

"Well, some people thank the Lord for favors; but I suppose a fellow of your caliber thanks himself that he had the skill to fall and break his leg without doing worse. Now if I get you out of this, you don't want to go racing around the country like mad."

Poor Mrs. Heckman thought that her cup of sorrow was full to overflowing. It was hard that with all their struggle to get ahead, this calamity should come upon them. Added to the anxiety as to the result of the accident was the troublesome thought of the doctor's bill and other necessary expenses — besides, the garden which Beth had undertaken to cultivate, and the berries which were put out in the spring, must be neglected — for the care of the invalid was the first duty, and a very trying invalid he proved to be. Altogether Mrs. Heckman felt that the burden was indeed a very heavy one.

When John said — "Oh, mother, don't feel so; some good must come out of it," she responded in the midst of her moaning —

"If I could see any possible good to come of it

I would not complain, but it seemed as though we had all we could bear up under before."

Another time she said — "If you had only been more careful about making Stephen angry — it has only brought trouble upon us all, and laid an additional burden upon your own shoulders, and no possible good has been accomplished by your talking to him."

"I am not sure of that. Maybe Stephen will come to see things differently."

"I have no hope of that. You have not heard him talk; he is more bitter and rebellious than ever, and more set against you and Beth. Poor Beth is quite worn out trying to please him."

"But you know he is suffering now, and hardly knows what he is saying; let us be hopeful."

"I am glad you can be hopeful, I cannot; it is just a dark cloud without any bright lining."

As the suffering became less intense, Stephen began asking for something to read. He wanted a book from his room.

"I don't suppose it will hurt you to bring it to me; if you are afraid of contamination, you might take a pair of tongs."

"Why, is it greasy and dog-eared?" asked Beth, with a cheery smile.

"No, it is new; but I suppose you and John are too fine and high-toned to read dime novels."

"Oh, that is it! Well, suppose we wait until

the doctor comes; and if he says so, I will bring it without the tongs."

But the doctor peremptorily forbade any reading by the invalid; Beth might read to him bits from the daily paper that he would bring up the next day. But soon there came a morning when he said —

"Now if you behave yourself first-rate to-day and sleep well to-night, I will bring you a book to-morrow, and you may read an hour a day."

That same morning John had an errand which took him in the direction of the doctor's route, and he accepted an invitation to ride. As they rode past the Heckman fields, the doctor asked —

"Who did the ploughing and sowing here this year?"

"I did the most of it," replied John. "I was not used to it, and I suppose things do not look as promising as they ought."

The doctor did not seem to notice John's apologetic tone, and responded with a gruff, — "Humph! Can't Stephen plow?"

"Yes; but Stephen hasn't much taste for farming."

"And have you a taste for it?" The question was accompanied by a sharp look at the boy, who was now in turn apologizing for his brother.

"No, I don't think I have a real taste for it; but I make the best of it, seeing I have to do it."

"Then you did not choose farming as an occupation?"

"Yes; I chose it."

"May I ask why you choose it if you have not a taste for it?"

"Because it seemed to be my duty." John's tone implied that the one word "duty" settled it.

"Yours any more than Stephen's?"

"I cannot judge of Stephen's duty; I am only sure of my own."

"Are both of you needed on the farm?"

It may have occurred to John that Dr. Watson was asking a great many questions; but he did not by word or look express any wonder, and replied to this last one —

"We could both be kept busy; but Stephen hates it so that he does not accomplish much."

"Shirks, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir; I don't mean to say that."

"But it amounts to that."

"Not just that. Some way Steve can't get hold of the right end of things. He has plenty of energy, but when it comes to farm work, he does not seem to have any grip."

The doctor laughed at this explanation, and presently he said, watching as he spoke, the expression of the boy's face —

"I have been thinking that perhaps when Stephen gets well, one of you might be spared

to come into my office and study. How would you like that?"

"Oh, sir, I should like it! You are very kind to think of it, but I do not think I could be spared from home. But if you would give Stephen the chance!"

"Do you think Stephen would like to study medicine?"

"Yes, sir; I think he would. I don't know as he has ever thought of it, but I have often thought he ought to be a doctor. He knows a great deal about things to do when any of our animals are sick, and I have noticed things that make me think he has a taste for surgery."

"Humph! Maybe he would make a good horse-doctor." And again the doctor laughed, adding, after a pause — "Well, I want you to think about my proposition and let me know when you decide. I give you the first chance. I have been thinking for some time about taking a young fellow into my office. I am not at all sure that I should want that brother of yours, any way. A fellow who can't get a grip on things will never do much in a doctor's office."

"Oh, doctor! Stephen can get a good strong grip on books." John hastened to disabuse the doctor's mind of any unfavorable impression which his words might have given him.

"Maybe. But a boy who can take hold of a

thing whether he likes it or not will succeed anywhere, and perhaps if Stephen were left alone again he would see the point and take up farming with more energy."

"I don't believe anything would ever make Stephen interested in the farm," declared John.

"Not even a sense of 'duty'?" The doctor's eyes twinkled as he stopped to let his companion down from the carriage, though the boy could not see anything funny in the conversation.

Dr. Watson's questions and suggestions awakened the old ambition and the question that he thought he had settled away back in the dear church at the old home, and again in the silence of the long winter nights it came up and insisted upon a hearing. He supposed he had strangled and buried beyond thought of resurrection his hopes and plans for study and a professional life, and here they were again asserting themselves. True, he had never thought of the medical profession, but, as Dr. Watson said, a man might make a good physician though he had no special drawing that way. A taste for the science of medicine might develop with study, and here was this opportunity thrust right in his pathway. Might he not have been mistaken as to the method by which he could best help the family out of their difficulties? Could he not do better work by and by if he were to leave home now and

let things run on as they might until he could establish himself in a business or profession that would pay better? Why should all his ambitions and hopes be crushed out by this heavy burden? Joe and Stephen had each in turn tried to carry it and had failed. Could it be carried by a boy?

The long, hot July days slipped away, and the middle of August had come. John had managed the haying and harvesting with the aid of Colonel Parsons' man, and was now ready for a new enterprise. At breakfast one morning he said —

"I must begin plowing for wheat to-day. If you need help in lifting Stephen, you will find me in the hill-lot."

The evening before, he had met Dr. Watson, who called out — "I hope you have not forgotten my proposition. I shall be up your way in a day or two, and shall ask for your decision." The doctor said to himself as he passed on — "I know to a certainty what he will say. I haven't been watching those young fellows for nothing all summer. There is good stuff in both of them, though Stephen is badly warped, and to my way of thinking, John is a little twisted. A fellow that will stand and fight his own interests has no business in this world."

In all these weeks John had not been able to still the questioning. He could not put the subject entirely aside; it would come up. Mechan-

ically he harnessed the horses and hitched them to the plough, all the while absorbed in the bitterness of his own thoughts. Was it simply the power of the association of ideas that, as he put his hand to the plough, with a chirrup to his team, there flashed through his mind the words of his Master — "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"? And as quickly came the response in John's inmost soul — "I will not look back; I have put my hand to the plough." Yet, all the morning, as he went round and round the field, he thought of the bitterness of the life he had chosen. Once he stopped at the spring at the lower end of the field for a drink, and there came to him a scene which he had sometimes pictured in his mind, and he said aloud — "And they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter." And as quickly he recalled the context — "And he cried unto the Lord and . . . the waters were made sweet." As he resumed his work, he said — "I don't know where the tree is that is going to make this Marah sweet, but I suppose it will be shown me in good time."

CHAPTER XI.

'PLAIN SPEAKING.

"He that harkeneth unto counsel is wise."

MEANTIME, Stephen had been slowly convalescing. The book which Dr. Watson had brought out according to his promise was a work on physiology, an advanced text-book.

"There is a chapter in that on surgery, and I think it will answer some questions you were asking the other day. When a fellow has a broken leg, he naturally wants to know something about broken legs, eh?"

The limb was now doing so well that daily visits were no longer necessary, and it was two or three days before the doctor came again.

"Well, have you read that chapter I spoke of?"

"Read it! I know the whole book by heart."

"You do! Young man, you did not obey orders."

"Can't help it — I couldn't let it alone, and I don't think it hurt me a bit, only" —

"Only what?"

"Nothing, only it makes me feel like cursing my fate."

"Your fate! What do you mean by that expression?"

The doctor stood over by the window, and he now turned and came and sat down by the bed. "See here, young man. I am your physician, but I am your friend as well, and I want you to tell me what is the matter. First, though, let me tell you how much I know. I remember that four or five years ago I used to hear my son speak of a young fellow at school called Steve Heckman. He always spoke of him as the best Latin scholar and the best debater. And then I remember that at the school exhibitions this same boy used to make a very creditable appearance. Lately I have neither seen nor heard much of him, and the little I have seen and heard is not very gratifying. Now what is the matter?"

Stephen fairly growled out his reply —

"Matter? The matter is that Fate has been too much for me."

"There it is again! That expression 'fate.' Just what do you mean by it?"

"I mean just what people always mean by it. In my case it means tied, hand and foot —

bound by a chain to this farm life, which I hate."

"Humph! Do you think you have made a successful farmer?"

"No; I do not suppose I have. You couldn't expect a fellow to make a success of a thing he hates, could you?"

"Well, I don't know. There is a story of a fellow who was faithful over a few things, and who, in consequence, became ruler over many things, and, if I remember rightly, we are not told that he had a taste for doing the few things; that does not seem to have entered into the question at all. It was just being faithful, whether he liked it or not; see? Now, so far as I can learn, you have not made yourself of any great account here. So far as your work on the farm goes, you would not be greatly missed; and yet you grumble because you are not promoted and made ruler over a great kingdom."

Stephen was growing vexed, and made no reply. The doctor slowly measured out the powders, and folded the squares of paper with great precision. Presently he said —

"I suppose John could manage very well without you."

"He thinks he can," was the bitter response.

"Then, if you cannot put your strength and interest into farming, why not let John go on

alone, and you try something else as soon as you are well enough?"

Now, indeed, Stephen was angry. Great red waves rolled over his face until the veins stood out upon his forehead. When he could speak, he said, with excitement — "Doctor, I intend to go as soon as I can walk. They need not have commissioned you to tell me that I am in the way. John told me as much the day I was hurt."

"Nonsense, boy! Do you think I would undertake any such commission? When I meddle, I do it on my own hook."

"Well, I shall go without anybody's meddling if they will only wait patiently."

"Where are you going?"

The question was asked quietly, and as if a matter of course.

"I don't know, neither do I care. I presume I shall bring up at the City of Destruction some time. It might as well be first as last."

"Stephen!" — and Dr. Watson laid his hand soothingly upon the boy's throbbing brow — "you are talking absurdly. Now let me state the case. In the first place, believe me that I want to be your friend. You have come to a place where you need a friend, and if you will let me, I think I can help you. It would seem that, as the oldest of the family, you might be expected to make the sacrifice" —

"I'd like to ask if I haven't sacrificed my life here!" interrupted Stephen.

The doctor smiled. "There are two or three things to make one laugh over that remark. In the first place, it is only a little piece of your life that you have given here; and again, it does not appear that you have made a very successful thing of your sacrifice. If you had shown a little more backbone, and stood up under the trial, and borne it like a man, instead of giving up and making a fizzle of everything, I should have more hope of you. I have always held to the opinion that it is only when a man settles down to doing his best in any sphere, however distasteful the work may be, that he gets promoted. There was, you remember, another fellow in the story who did not like the responsibility put upon him, and shirked, and there is no intimation that he ever had a chance to try over again. I am not a Christian myself, but the book that Christians make so much of has in it a great many sound truths, and this is one of them — that the man who is faithful gets his reward, and the other fellow gets his."

"See here, you said I talked absurdly when I said I expected to bring up at Destruction. Seems to me you are putting it that way pretty strong. You are making out that there is no other chance for a fellow." Stephen said this with bitterness.

"I am not. I want you to see that it is not what you call Fate that has spoiled things for you, but simply your own folly that has brought you where you are. Then I want you to realize that it is not too late to mend. You may have another chance to show yourself a man. It is nonsense for a boy of twenty to talk about its being too late. You have, as I look at it, lost one chance" —

"Yes; no need to tell me that! I lost everything three years ago, and what's the use of talking about it?"

"Boy, the chance you lost, or threw away, was the opportunity to show yourself a man by taking hold of things here at home. That chance has gone by. John, in case he concludes to stay here, as no doubt he will, will not fail. He does not like farming any better than you do, but I tell you, my boy, John has something that you have not. He has what he calls faith. It may be a delusion — I rather think it is — but it serves a good purpose for all, and he will be a success. Now, you need not be vexed at me or at anybody else, but just get well as soon as possible, and if you can make up your mind to be helped, perhaps we can arrange things so that you need not take an express train for that city you seem determined to head for. I have brought another book. Read as much as you like, only be careful not to overtire yourself."

The boy did not offer to touch the book which was laid upon the bed within his reach; but as the door closed upon the plain-spoken man he turned his head upon his pillow and exclaimed, angrily — "The old meddler! I would just thank him to mind his own business! Who wants his advice or his help? I can manage for myself." Just here he was reminded of Dr. Watson's remark — "You have not made a success of it," and he said aloud — "Well, I haven't, that is a fact! I've been a fool and I know it. But that does not help matters. I wonder if it is true, as Dr. Watson said, that John does not like farming."

The next time the doctor came, he asked — "How did you like that book?"

"First-rate! But there are one or two things I want to ask you about."

Stephen did not see the sudden gleam in the eyes of his visitor, nor did he know that he was thinking — "Ah, life isn't all done for with this young man yet?"

Then as the young man asked for an explanation of the points that puzzled him, the doctor said — "Oh, I see your difficulty; you ought to study anatomy; I'll send you a book that will clear it all up for you."

It became a curious puzzle to Beth, what the invalid could find interesting in those dry-looking

books that Dr. Watson was constantly bringing or sending to him during those tedious weeks of confinement. He had never repeated his request regarding the book in his own room, but astonished them all by asking to have his old Latin books looked up and brought to him, and he took to poring over them with great eagerness.

At length the patient had so far recovered that there was no further need of the physician's attendance, even occasionally. As he was leaving that last morning, he said —

"Stephen, do you think you have backbone enough to turn forever away from liquor, tobacco and cards, and the set at Howland's?"

Stephen's cheeks flushed, and he replied a little gruffly — "Seems to me you have a pretty poor opinion of my backbone; every time you come you have something to say about it, insinuating that it is weak."

"Well, I wish you would find out and let me know. I have had a talk with John, and he says he means to stick to the farm. Now I know of a pretty fair sort of a chance for you; but, Stephen, I tell you frankly that you cannot carry any of these old habits into the new life to which I propose to introduce you. I am in a hurry this morning," glancing at his watch; "I am to meet Dr. Grannis at ten, over on the east side, for a consultation. If I am not detained too long, I

will drive back this way and finish the talk. Meantime you can examine that moral spinal column of yours and find out how stiff it is."

He closed the door behind him, and the convalescent watched him from the window, thinking as he noted the firm step — "Yours is stiff enough, any way; anybody can see that."

A few moments later, Beth was busy about the room, and Stephen, still watching the doctor's carriage as it followed a winding road to the east side, said —

"Beth, do you know I would be willing to work like a galley-slave, even on a farm, if I could see a chance of getting through a course of study in medicine? But there is no use in thinking about it. That doctor has got a scheme in his head. I suppose he wants me to stand behind a counter and measure off yards of silk and lace. He probably thinks I will jump at the chance." He tossed aside the magazine which Dr. Watson had handed to him as he went out, and turned wearily away from the sunshine which streamed in at the window and from the light that danced in Beth's eyes.

John had told his sister of the proposition made to him and of his determination to stick by the farm, and had added —

"Now if he would only give Steve the place. I thought at first that he would, but he did not

say a word about it when I told him I should stay here, and I do not think he means to. You see he is not the kind of a man to give a boy a place just for the boy's sake, and he thinks Stephen is not quite steady."

Beth, thinking of the books which had been so constantly furnished for the invalid during these weeks, and divining something of the great warm heart that was hidden under the somewhat rough manner of the old doctor, thought differently, and as she listened to Stephen's hopeless remarks and remembered John's lack of faith in the doctor's intentions to favor the elder brother, she said to herself —

"I shouldn't wonder if both boys were somewhat astonished."

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

TO go back to that evening of Beth's tea-party, and the group sitting on the Heckman door-step in the June twilight.

"Isn't it nice to meet together once in a while like this?"

It was Mame Howard who thus expressed herself, and Lizzie Davis who responded — "Yes, indeed. And we must try to get even with Beth. We cannot afford to let Beth plan all the nice things."

"Cheaper, as far as our brains are concerned," put in Bob.

"I say, let's get up a West Hill Fourth of July celebration!"

Mame was thinking of Jack Swan's scheme for getting up a party of boys to go to the city to

spend the Fourth, and as she spoke there sprung up in her heart a sudden hope that if they could do something pleasant at home, her brother Clarence might possibly be persuaded to stay, but this thought she kept hidden.

"That's an idea!" chimed in a voice. "How did you happen to think of it?"

There was talk, eager and fast, after that. All sorts of schemes, practicable and impracticable, were proposed. One wanted a band of music and a procession with flags and banners, and fireworks in the evening. It was even suggested that a cannon might be borrowed for the occasion, so that for once West Hill should boom. After all the wild projects had been discussed, it was decided that there should be a dinner in the grove, preceded by the reading of the Declaration of Independence, speeches, and some songs if possible; any way — "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "America."

"We ought to have a flag," declared Lizzie Davis.

"Why couldn't we? We girls could make it if we could only get the bunting, and I don't believe it would be so very difficult to raise the money."

"Let's try it. Two of us can take the valley end of the district, and two others the hill, and see what can be done by way of raising money."

This plan was carried out, and, after many and

varied experiences, the committee reported funds sufficient to procure a large, handsome flag, which still, upon all public occasions, floats in the breeze on West Hill.

Just a day or two before Stephen's accident, Beth received a note from Lizzie, in which she said —

"Don't you think the Declaration is awful long and prosy? Nobody will listen to it. Can't we cut out part of it, or have somebody tell the story in a way to interest the children? It will take a better reader than we have amongst us to hold the attention through all that long rigmarole. I mean no disrespect to the ancient and honored document. Now, Beth, dear, set your brain at work upon this puzzle — How shall we make this part of our programme interesting?"

And Beth, studying the question, and watching two young men of the vicinity passing with uncertain steps and loud voices, exclaimed —

"What we need most is a new Declaration of Independence."

There was plenty of time to think it out in the long nights of watching that followed so quickly, and Lizzie and the rest of the committee were more than pleased with the result. "It will be all that I can do for the celebration," said Beth. "Of course, I shall not be there, but I want my name to go down as one of the signers."

The Fourth was a bright day — sunny but not uncomfortably warm. At the grove everything was ready, and a large company gathered. It was such a novel idea to have anything going on in the neighborhood that everybody turned out to see what it might amount to. The flag waved triumphantly; the songs were rendered, if not with artistic perfection, at least with spirit; the speeches were enthusiastic and patriotic. The reading of the Declaration was relegated to the last place on the programme.

Mr. Ames, who had been asked to read it, arose, saying — "I observe that this is a written copy. No explanation has been given me, but I suppose that the idea is to make it seem more like the original, more real. I have been too much occupied to look it over, but presume that with such fair chirography as this appears to be I shall have no trouble." Then, clearing his throat as if for a great effort, he began —

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary, or is deemed expedient for a people or class to take a new departure, to break away from bands that have hindered their progress, to assume new obligations and duties, and to take advanced positions upon any question, it becomes proper that they should state their reasons for the action.

"We hold it to be self-evident that we all have

certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, including the right to the highest development of all its powers, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We claim that the laws and customs of any land, or indeed of any neighborhood, should guarantee peace and quiet to homes, the safety of lives and health, the right to the pursuit of wealth in lines that shall not interfere with the property of one's neighbors. We hold that the law of God is supreme and that we have a right to protest when our rights are trampled upon — when the peace and prosperity of the community is threatened.

"The aggressive nature of the kingdom of the tyrant, King Alcohol, is well known, and the history of his reign upon earth is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having as a direct object the establishment of an absolute despotism over the human race.

"To prove this let a few facts be submitted —

"He enters homes, and winds about the dearest and best the chains of habit until they are his slaves, bound hand and foot, with no choice but to do his bidding.

"He enters society, and threads the meshes of his web so adroitly in and out that countless thousands are entangled before they dream of danger.

"He enters churches with wily tread, and in the guise of conservatism and discretion dulls the

ear of the pews and palsies the tongue of the pulpit.

"He enters the halls of legislation and enslaves those who should enact righteous laws.

"He forces his way into courts of justice, and unnerves those that would render just decisions.

"He has boldly invaded the quiet retreat of West Hill, and quartered upon us a recruiting office, extorting from us a heavy tribute and enlisting in his army those who should be enlisted on the side of truth and sobriety.

"He has thus destroyed the peace and quiet of the neighborhood, infringing upon those rights which we have declared to be inalienable.

"He has compelled our friends and neighbors, taken captive in this high-handed manner, to bear arms against their own homes.

"He has incited domestic disturbances, and endangered the comfort and prosperity of the community.

"We have endured in patience, waiting for the politicians and law-makers to take up the matter; we have heard much of the magnanimity of the emissaries of King Alcohol; but we have not experienced the kindness at their hands which we might have looked for in accordance with their professions; all have alike been deaf to the voice of justice and mercy.

"We, therefore, appealing to the righteous

Judge of all for help and protection, do solemnly declare that we, the people of West Hill in general conference assembled, do in our own name and authority solemnly publish and declare that we are, and of right ought to be, free and independent, absolved from all allegiance to the tyrant Alcohol. That we hereby pledge ourselves to total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, including wine, beer and cider, and that we furthermore pledge ourselves to stand firm in our opposition to the liquor traffic, and to refrain, so far as it lies in our power, from all complicity with, or patronage of, the saloon.

"Under the name of the Temperance League of West Hill we thus mutually pledge ourselves in this new Declaration of Independence."

Mr. Ames began reading this remarkable document with the air of one perfectly familiar with the ground he is treading; but as he proceeded his tone became less confident, and the expression of his face betokened perplexity; he did not seem to be quite certain whether or not a joke had been played upon him, while many of the listeners seemed to share his perplexity. However, he presently seemed to take in the idea, while his face cleared and he read on triumphantly to the end.

Mr. Davis, who had been chosen chairman of the day, then arose. He said —

"I am informed that, as chairman of the meeting, it is my duty to place this matter, which has been so clearly presented, before you for your sanction or your rejection. What will be your pleasure with regard to this declaration and pledge?"

Some one moved, and another seconded, its adoption as a whole. It may be that it was regarded in the minds of many present as a huge joke; yet there were those whose emphatic "Ay" was earnest and sincere, with a full understanding of the purport of the whole matter. When the "No's" were called for, there seemed to be one only who wished to declare allegiance to King Alcohol, and the effect of the solitary "No" was almost ludicrous.

The list of signatures was long. As usual, some who were expected to sign would not, and others surprised everybody, themselves included, by putting down their names.

The company broke up early; for in a farming community this must always be the case. As they separated, shaking hands while the long, slanting rays of the setting sun made a mellow light about them, it was the unanimous verdict that the affair had been a success; and the thought seemed to be dawning upon those farmers that West Hill was waking up.

"Dean," said Mr. Wilson, coming in with a pail of foaming milk, "we must get out the

mower in the morning; and if you go up to the Corners to-night, you may as well take the oil-can and get it filled."

Dean Wilson looked up with a curious expression on his rather handsome face, and asked what seemed for the moment to be an irrelevant question —

"Father, did you sign that declaration to-day?"

"Why, yes, of course I did! Haven't I always been a temperance man? And I was glad to see your name there, my boy."

"I guess I may as well hitch up old Doll and drive down to Crapo's for the oil," said Dean.

"Why, what in the world" — began Mr. Wilson; then, as if a new thought had come to him, he stopped, and finished rinsing his milk-pail in silence. And Dean drove to Crapo's for machine oil — a distance of four miles. As he was starting his father said — "You may as well ask your mother for a list of needed household supplies; it may not be convenient to go in again this week."

Dean whistled softly as he drove off, thinking — "Those girls have rather stolen a march on some of these old temperance men."

And Beth, sitting on the door-step, listening to John's account of the events of the day, said, suddenly —

"John, it may be a slow-match; but I think our Hell Gate has been touched off to-day."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TALKING MULTITUDE.

"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"

"THAT John Heckman seems to be of different stuff from the others," said one neighbor to another.

"Well, I don't know; if you remember, Joe did pretty well for a year or two after the father died; then he grew reckless, and things began to run down, and he kept getting more and more unsteady; all that time Steve was in school, and my Bob says he was the best scholar amongst them all at the Union School. I really thought he would be the man of the family; but after Joe went off Steve began to grow unsteady and go down hill. I have watched them, and they all seem to get about so far on the right road, and then turn about and go the other way. I have no confidence in them."

"I know they all appear well when they are younger; still, I cannot help thinking that perhaps this one will turn out better. There is a different look about him; you see it in his step and in the expression of his face."

"I am sure I hope so; but, as I said, I have no faith in a Heckman."

"Still, the blood is good. The father was a good man and a straightforward one."

"Yes; but there seems to be a slack-twisted thread somewhere in warp or woof. Now that Beth is a nice, ladylike girl, and my Lizzie is always quoting her, and I sometimes think Bob fancies her; but I tell them to wait and see how they come out."

How truly might John Heckman have said — "All my familiars watched for my halting," and yet the neighbors meant to be just and kind. All through Stephen's long confinement they had seemed to vie with each other in neighborly helpfulness; and though the accident had occurred at the beginning of the busy season, those hurried farmers found time for the neighborly call, and strength for an occasional night of watching to relieve the overburdened family. But too many of them, like Mr. Davis, had lost faith in the Heckmans, and had come to think that the qualities out of which good citizens are made had died out of the family. If they could

have heard all the planning of those two young things as to how to better affairs both at home and in the neighborhood, doubts as to the soundness of their own conclusions might have troubled them. It is possible, too, that their eyes might have been opened to see the necessity for reform. There were some who saw the need.

"Things have gone a great deal to the bad here on West Hill." Mr. Wilson leaned over the line fence and whittled, while Mr. Scott was husking in his own field upon the other side of the fence. "I remember," continued Mr. Wilson, "when things were different."

"Yes, so do I! Even ten years ago things were not as they are now. Sometimes I think that when Heckman died our luck died with him. One thing is certain, we have been running down hill ever since."

"That is so. I shouldn't wonder if we owed more to his prayers than we realized. When he died we had no praying man left amongst us."

"Fact!" And Mr. Scott pulled the rustling husks from the long, yellow ears more slowly, as he said, thoughtfully —

"And I don't believe that saloon would be running if he were alive; and it is ruining all our young men. Pity that we haven't spirit enough here on the Hill to shut up the place."

"The Temperance League are doing their best; but the odds are against them. Some who joined rather went back on the thing when they found it meant business; but I know of several who have given up going to Howland's."

"I haven't heard anything about that society lately, and I supposed it had died out."

"No, not by a long sight! You'll hear from them before spring."

"They will find it hard work to bring about anything better. Some way the Howlands have got a strong hold; and it is a pretty good place to trade."

"Have you hired a teacher for the winter?" asked Mr. Wilson, suddenly changing the subject.

"No; and that is another thing that has run down. Don't you remember what a good school we used to have, with spelling-schools and debates in the evenings?"

"I remember; but there was no other place to go then, and now the boys and young men — and old men, too, for that matter — sit around and drink beer and play cards."

"Yes, I know. Have you heard anything of this scheme of John Heckman's to get up a reading circle? At first I thought it was all nonsense, and told him so — just another plan to get together for a frolic; but I don't know — maybe it would help a little. Perhaps it would be best

to give them an encouraging word and let them have the school-house, too."

"What is it, anyway? I heard Dean say something about it; but, as you say, I thought it was only a cover for more fun, and I didn't pay much attention to it."

"Why, John came to me to know if the young folks could have the school-house one evening in the week for a reading circle. He said something about there being a circle that went all around the world, and a lot of little circles hung on — like little rings strung on a big one, I suppose. He had a book that tells all about it; but I thought it was all nonsense, and didn't pay much attention. I told him that we did not like to let the school-house for all sorts of meetings. He said he supposed not, but that he thought a reading circle would not be objectionable, especially as we sometimes had let in traveling shows, and that the purpose of the reading circle was more elevating than the talk of that infidel lecturer we let in three or four weeks ago; and, to tell the truth, I was ashamed to make any more excuses after that."

"Well, if they will promise to behave, I don't see any reason why they should not have the use of the building."

"He said we could look in any time, and if we did not like the way they were doing we could turn them out."

"That's fair."

"Yes; and I think I will let him have the key. The boy has a pretty even piece of wheat there."

"I have noticed it; and that piece of spring wheat that he put in was by all odds the best crop there has been on the place for years."

"Has Steve left for good?" asked Mr. Scott.

"Dean says that Dr. Watson has taken him into his office. It was reported that he had secured a place as a hostler somewhere in Clayborne, but I guess it is a fact that he has got a chance to study."

"If he will only keep steady — but he won't!"

"That Arbor Day business went off pretty well," remarked Mr. Wilson, throwing aside his stick and closing his knife as if he had reached the last topic of interest. "And I notice that all the trees around the school-house are alive and doing finely."

"I own up beaten there. It is such a long time since we have had anything but tomfoolery here on the Hill that I was determined to keep them off the school Green; but they did their work well and behaved decently, too!"

The C. L. S. C. of West Hill was an assured fact. Whether they could have the school-house or not, they were determined not to be thwarted in their undertaking. The membership was not large, but it was enthusiastic. As to how it sug-

gested itself to the minds of the young people, the explanation is simple. One summer, while living with his uncle, John Heckman had spent a few weeks at the headquarters of the C. L. S. C., and had then become interested in the scheme, though his uncle had objected to his undertaking the course, thinking it would interfere with his school work. But his aunt belonged; and among the books which she had put in John's trunk were one of the hand-books and "The Hall in the Grove." Beth and Lizzie had become interested by reading these, and they had succeeded in interesting Bob, and after getting all the information John could give them they had voted to have a circle.

"Even if it should be just a square with four of us, one for each corner!" said Beth, mindful of a certain circle which began as a triangle.

"That would certainly be a solution of the old problem of squaring the circle," said John, laughing.

And so the "higher education" of the young people on West Hill began. A mile or so down the valley was the Munson farm. Mr. Munson and his family were not exactly West Hill people, living, as they did, just over in the next school district; but the young people were very desirable as members of the C. L. S. C. Mr. Munson was a good man, a Christian and a prominent man

in the Clayborne church, which John and Beth now attended with more or less regularity. He was a rather stern man, cold and unsympathetic; and especially he had little sympathy with the plans and schemes of young people. He could not understand why they should "waste their time" in playing games and running about to social gatherings. He was a strong advocate of "home pleasures" and "home amusements"—though after spending a few days in the family one would be puzzled to understand his definition of the terms he was so fond of using, for surely never was home more destitute of the things that contribute to pleasure and amusement.

He looked upon the people at West Hill as a hard set; indeed, he had been heard to remark that if there were missionary ground anywhere it might be found within five miles from Clayborne; yet, strange to say, he did not seem to feel called upon to "lend a hand" in spreading the gospel amongst these "heathen" at his door. Knowing something of the opinions of his neighbor, it was with some misgivings that Dean Wilson undertook to interview the young Munsons upon the subject of the circle.

He was pretty sure of their cordial sympathy; but how to manage so that their father might not spoil everything, by setting his face against the scheme, and peremptorily forbidding them to have

any part in it was the question that puzzled the young man. It so happened that the conversation shaped itself so as to lead up to the very thought in mind. The fact that a new craze had struck Clayborne in the form of a series of surprise parties, was commented upon; and Mr. Munson took occasion to speak very strongly against that form of entertainment, and very pointedly remarked that to his mind it was an evidence of the degeneracy of the times, that young people so entirely discarded all forms of sensible and profitable entertainment. If young people were brought up with habits of reading and study well established, they would not care to be "running off to parties, wasting precious time in frivolous conversation and silly games."

This seemed to be the opportunity for which Dean waited, and he hastened to remark — "We have been thinking, up our way, that we ought to have something profitable going on, and we have decided to start a reading circle; and I came down here to-night to ask Tom and the girls to join."

"Tom and the girls" recognized in this a decidedly new departure for Dean Wilson, for he was far removed from any suspicion of being literary; however, they were interested at once, and asked eagerly about the plan, while Mr. Munson seemed not quite pleased at being caught up in that fash-

ion, and he said, in a puzzled way — "Eh, what?"

Dean tried to explain the object and scope of the circle; but Mr. Munson was inclined to criticise.

"I don't see any call for — well, for my folks, for instance, going off a mile or two from home to read, when they can just as well sit down here and read together, and save the time spent running back and forth."

"Mr. Munson" — and there was a twinkle in Dean's eyes as he spoke — "you go to prayer-meeting at Clayborne, do you not?"

"Certainly! I have not missed a mid-week meeting in ten years; I am always there."

"I hope you will excuse me if I ask why the same reasoning will not apply in regard to the prayer-meeting; folks can pray and read their Bibles at home; why waste time going back and forth?" He said afterward — "I knew it was not exactly a parallel case, but I thought I would venture it." His host was very patient with his ignorance and with what seemed to the older man like levity.

"My friend, it is a very different thing. We are commanded to assemble ourselves together, and, besides, there is great profit in united prayer."

"Thank you for that word 'profit.' There is

where the cases are alike; we think that there is profit in united study. You see we get together and talk over our readings, and so have the benefit of each other's thought on the subject."

"It all sounds very well, but I see through it as plain as day. You young folks on the Hill are after fun more than reading; all the reading you will do won't count for much."

"But, sir, there is a regular course laid out — so much for every week, and we are pledged to keep up."

"I don't know how you folks up your way expect to find time to read regularly so much a day. There's those Heckmans; by the looks of things there, they need to do something besides reading. That was one of the best farms in the county, and look at it now! All run down, and the boys growing up shiftless, and worthless, too! I have no patience with that way of bringing up boys. Now there's this new-comer, John; he brought a letter and united with the church; but he does not go to church more than half the time, and he never goes to the prayer-meeting, and his mother hasn't been inside of the church more than half a dozen times since her husband died, and such a good meeting-man as he was, too!"

"Have you ever thought what might be the reason that they do not go to church?"

"Generally, folks don't go because they don't want to — that is my theory."

"I can see a dozen reasons why the Heckmans do not go. John is a nice fellow, and things are going on better up there. I guess you haven't been up that way, lately. You would see a change."

"Well, I believe that folks don't prosper any more for neglecting their church duties, and I should like to see John Heckman and his mother in the prayer-meeting before I countenance any reading circles of their getting-up. Now if you were thinking of starting a weekly prayer-meeting at the Corners, I should most heartily approve."

"But, Mr. Munson, who would pray? You forget that the people up that way are not of the praying sort."

"Father!" — it was Tom who suddenly spoke, as if he had resolved to cut off any further objections: "you are always talking about the people of that neighborhood being rather a hard lot; now it seems to me that if they are going to try to do something elevating, we Christians ought to turn in and help them." As Tom was not a Christian, but quite inclined to scoff at religion, his remark matched the sarcastic tone in which it was uttered. He continued — "I am going to join that C. D. E. F., or whatever it is, and I shall miss my calculations if I do not take Lou and

Jennie along. So, Dean, you may put us down as members in good and regular standing."

There were occasions when a certain ring in Tom's voice warned his father that opposition was worse than useless, and this was one of them.

Going into his room after his round of fastening the doors for the night, Mr. Munson said, in a tone that betokened real anxiety — "I am sorry Tom took that stand. I don't like our children being mixed up with affairs in that neighborhood." Then, as if he was nerving himself up to an unpleasant duty — "I believe I ought to go and talk with Sister Heckman and John. They are the only professing Christians in that neighborhood, and they ought to set an example of godly living."

CHAPTER XIV.

SHOULDERS, OR CONSCIENCE?

"These be thy gods, O Israel!"

ONE Saturday John went to Clayborne to mill. It so happened that Stephen had chosen this time for a visit at home; and, coming around by a longer way in order to do an errand for Dr. Watson, he missed John. He had the grace to express his regret, sincerely, I think, on this account.

During the morning, directly after Stephen's arrival, Colonel Parsons came in to have a talk with John and his mother about a business proposal which he had to make. Finding John away, he sat down to talk it over with the rest of the family.

"Mrs. Heckman," he commenced, "scattered through your wood-lot across the gulf are a dozen or fifteen oaks, which are getting past their prime. If they could be cut now, they would be worth a

small fortune. If you will give me the privilege of taking them out, I will pay a good price and be much obliged besides. I have a heavy contract to fill — that is, I will take the contract if I can get the timber, and oak is scarce about here. In fact, the timber lands in this section are pretty well thinned out, but that twenty-acre lot of yours is very heavily timbered. The smaller lot on this side was somewhat cut over in your husband's time and it would be a good plan to go through the other judiciously. If I can make a bargain with you I will go through and cut what ought to be cut, leaving all the growing trees and leaving the limbs for you, to be cut into fire-wood."

The offer which Colonel Parsons proceeded to make for the oaks was so liberal as to almost take away Mrs. Heckman's breath. She had never suspected that she had so much wealth growing upon her farm. The wood-lots were to her and her children valuable only as a source of supply of fuel. That there might be a way out of their pecuniary difficulties by turning some of the timber into money had never occurred to this woman, so unused was she to business calculations. And now that the knowledge had come upon her so suddenly, she was quite overwhelmed. Colonel Parsons said further —

"If you choose and John likes the idea, you can let half the sum apply on the note, and I

will pay half cash down. That will enable you to put yourselves in better shape."

Stephen urged his mother to accept the offer at once, but she said —

"I must wait and see what John says."

"John! What has he to do with it? You own the place, and can do as you choose; and it seems to me that if Beth and I both advise it, and since John is not here, it is quite unnecessary to wait to consult him, especially as Colonel Parsons wants an answer right away."

Beth was quite inclined to urge her mother to close the bargain as Stephen advised, saying —

"It will be such a splendid surprise for John when he comes home!"

"And if you wait, John will be sure to pick a flaw in the plan and upset it; he is so much wiser than the rest of us," muttered Stephen. But Mrs. Heckman reflected that as John was now doing all the work, and had shouldered the responsibility of the farm and the debt and the support of the family, it was only fair that he should be consulted; and she firmly declined to give a positive answer to the colonel's proposition.

"I should like your decision to-night, if possible, as I must close with Wagfall & Company on Monday; and, if I cannot get the lumber, I cannot take the contract." And with this the colonel departed.

"What does he want of the trees?" inquired Beth. "I mean, what does he furnish Wagfall & Company?"

"Why, beer-kegs, of course!" replied Stephen. "You see he will get out the logs this winter, and saw them or work them up into staves with his new stave machine; and then he will either kiln-dry them or let them season until next summer, when he will set the coopers at work on the kegs. It may be quite a time before he gets his money back; but he will make a good thing of it in the end, even though he pay a good price for the trees. The colonel knows how to make money."

"Yes, he is shrewd," replied the mother; "but he is generous; he has been very kind to John."

"Queer, too; John isn't the sort of a fellow that I should suppose Colonel Parsons would pick out to favor. The colonel isn't much of a saint himself, and I never could understand how he gets along with John's notions." Stephen's tone showed that he still looked upon John as a very eccentric fellow.

"Wait until he comes into antagonism with some of the colonel's ideas or plans," said Beth.

"Yes; that is why I was so anxious to have mother close the trade to-day. You'll find there's trouble ahead. John will never consent."

"Why, Steve, what makes you think so?"

"He is too much of a fanatic. And I was a little surprised at you, my lady sister. Though you are not of the saintly sort, yet you are dreadfully set on the temperance question. But most people make exceptions when there is money at stake," and Stephen laughed a little bitterly.

"I don't see what the oak trees have to do with temperance," said Beth.

"Don't, eh? Well, I don't, either; it wouldn't trouble my conscience; but I did not know how far your fanaticism would carry you."

"Why, mother, do you think our selling Colonel Parsons some oak trees has anything to do with the temperance question?"

"I cannot see that it has; we sell the trees standing, and have no further responsibility in the matter. I did not even think what he might be going to do with the lumber."

"I tell you what it is," said Stephen, with the air of one whose opinions were weighty, and who intended to bring others to his way of thinking if possible; "it is all very well to talk about not being mixed up with the business, and I think that so far as possible it is well to avoid what you call 'complicity with evil'; especially those who have set themselves up as the advocates of temperance will shun criticism by keeping out of it, but we must draw the line somewhere. Don't you see that to keep entirely out of it you must

live a hermit life? And I am not sure that you can buy a loaf of bread or a pound of meat that is entirely free from the taint of liquor. Carrying one's notions too far makes one ridiculous."

The few weeks spent in Dr. Watson's office had greatly changed Stephen Heckman; he had lost much of the recklessness that had so long characterized his speech and manner; he was not often bitter or sarcastic; and though he still sometimes ridiculed or sneered at John's "notions," he was much more brotherly, and seemed to appreciate, in some slight degree, at least, John's self-denial and the benefit which he was reaping from it. He came home as often as he found opportunity; and his mother and sister were growing proud of his improved appearance; and thus it was that his opinions had come to have more weight with Beth, who used so often to lose all patience with him. He stayed to dinner, and was so helpful, and so interested in home matters, and in every way so agreeable, that more and more the usually clear-sighted Beth saw things as he saw them. She went down to the gate with him, and watched the carriage until it disappeared around the curve; then she went back to her mother, and together they talked over the good fortune which had so suddenly and so unexpectedly come to them. All the afternoon Beth's head was full of the subject. She had put aside

all thoughts of its having anything to do with temperance principles. She decided that Stephen had just talked as he did to tease her; what had they to do with the disposition of the trees after they had passed into the possession of another? It was not as though the lumber might not be put to other uses. Of course, they wished that there were no such things as beer-barrels, and they hoped the day might come when there would be no use for them. If it were barley which they were planning to sell to the brewer, or corn to the distiller, it would be different, but people did not drink kegs. John was not quite so notional as Stephen seemed to think. And the price to be paid would be, as the colonel had said, a fortune to them in their circumstances. They could make themselves more comfortable in the house, put some repairs on the barns, and add to their stock and farming tools. It seemed to Beth's excited imagination that they were taking a straight road for the Canaan to which she and John were looking. Very impatiently she waited for her brother's return, and she could scarcely wait for him to care for his horses, so eager was she to tell her news.

"Oh, John, such good news! Such a surprise as we have for you! Mother and I have got over the surprise, and have settled down to the enjoyment of our good fortune in anticipation." Then

she told her story. John listened in silence, and she said, impatiently — "Why don't you say something? Isn't it splendid?"

He replied slowly, as if dreading to disappoint her — "Beth, do you think it would be right to do that?"

"Why not? Dear me! It is just as Stephen said! He wanted mother to close the bargain, because he said you would not consent if you were consulted, and I wanted her to accept the offer, because I wanted to surprise you with the thing all done, for sure."

"But, Beth, beer-kegs!"

"But what have we to do with that? Suppose we sold the whole farm — to Colonel Parsons, or anybody else — we couldn't dictate as to what should be done with those old oaks."

John was silent for a few moments; then he said, thoughtfully — "Beth, that may seem a puzzling question; but I think that, if I knew any part of the property to be transferred was to be used to further in any way the liquor interest, my duty as a Christian would be to refuse to entertain any proposition for its transfer." Turning to his mother, he asked — "If you had a vacant store, would you rent it for a saloon?"

"I think not; but this does not seem to me just the same."

"The same, only a little more remote."

"That is it! Things get more remote, and Stephen says we must draw the line somewhere," said Beth.

"And he would draw it between beer-barrels and oak trees. Beth, I do not believe that you think it is just the right place to draw it."

"Well, I did doubt it somewhat at first; but Stephen made it seem all right, and I hoped you would look at it that way; and the colonel offered such a good price, and it would take such a burden off your shoulders!" And the girl sighed sadly over a shattered hope.

"But I would rather have the burden on my shoulders than on my conscience."

"The money would take us such a long way through the desert or wilderness or whatever it is we are struggling through; but I suppose we must just struggle on."

"It may not be the right thing to do, after all," said the perplexed mother; "but it seemed to me to be providential, coming so unexpectedly, after we have had a hard time, with Stephen's accident and all. I thought perhaps it was the way the Lord was going to help us."

John tried to convince his mother that much good had come out of the events of those dark days that she so bemoaned, and assured her that they would do very well. They were very comfortable; and though they looked forward to a few

years of hard work and close economy, yet he felt sure that they would work their way out at last. And he told her how he had resolved that just as far as possible he would have nothing to do with the liquor traffic; that he would enter into no covenant with this enemy of homes and destroyer of souls. And some way, as John talked, Beth was with clearer vision and the mother grew stronger of heart.

It was a hard task set for John to announce their decision to Colonel Parsons. He anticipated the colonel's disappointment and displeasure; but he was not prepared for the storm that followed his announcement. The older man called his young neighbor ungrateful, accused him of setting himself up to criticise the actions of his superiors and elders; he pronounced him an idiot and a lunatic; and after pouring out his wrath for several minutes, he ended by declaring that if he saw a Heckman starving he would not give him a crust. He said — "Young man, the responsibility of the whole country's welfare does not rest upon your shoulders, though you seem to think so. I would like to inquire about what share of the responsibility you think would be yours in case you sold me those oaks, and a few men, more or less, should make fools of themselves and drink too much of Wagfall's beer? Your accountability will not be as great as you seem to think.

And the sooner you get down from your stilts the better. As it is, I want no more of you; I might have known how it would be. I did know, all the while, that I was making a fool of myself."

Until within the last few months Beth had never read or studied the Bible much; but, having entered into John's fancy about Egypt and Pharaoh and Canaan, she began to study up the story of the exodus of the olden time, and was constantly finding new grounds for parallels in their own experience. Sometimes John laughed at her fancies, and said the resemblance in their experiences was hard to find; but it all cheered them on their way, and brought the girl's mind into contact with Bible truth, which was, perhaps, the best part of it all. The Sabbath following this particular Saturday, she had been for some time bending over the large family Bible; afterward she sat for awhile, as was her habit, with her hands folded in her lap, and the far-off look in her eyes. Presently she spoke — "Moses, I made a golden calf yesterday, and all day I worshiped it. And I made a little feast, too; did you observe that the supper was a little nicer than usual? And then you came home and shattered my idol! I have so often wondered how those old Israelites could fall into idolatry; but it is just as easy! I suppose covetousness is idolatry, and I certainly coveted the money that those trees would bring,

and it was pretty hard to see my idol tumbling over and going all in pieces."

John came and stood beside Beth, laying his hand upon her shoulder with a caressing touch. "I knew it was a sad disappointment to you, but you will be glad some day. Let me tell you a story; it is one Uncle John read to us, and I suppose what he said about it made me remember it. There was a Mohammedan general, whose name was Mahmoud. He conquered India, and destroyed all the idols he found. Upon one occasion he was offered a large sum of money if he would spare one of the large idols. He hesitated only a moment; then said that he would rather be known as the destroyer than as the seller of idols, and ordered his soldiers to proceed with the work of destruction. The idol was hollow, and filled with treasures of gold and diamonds and other precious stones, so that the general was richer than he would have been had he accepted the bribe. And Uncle John said that when people were true to their convictions, and were willing to put away their idols, God would surely reward them in some unexpected way. It seems now as though this act of standing by what we think right had cost us dear; but if we wait a little, we may, like Mahmoud, find that the breaking of the idol was necessary that hidden treasures might be revealed to us." After a silence had

fallen between them for a time John said softly—"Beth, do you remember what Moses asked the people that day?"

"Do you mean when he said—'Who is on the Lord's side?'"

"Yes, I mean that; and do you remember that certain of the people ranged themselves boldly on his side? Beth, since you are drawing parallels, why not complete it and make the question personal?"

To this question the girl had no answer ready.

CHAPTER XV.

DEBT, DOUBT AND DELIVERANCE.

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

"DEAN says his father thinks taxes will be very high this year."

As he spoke, John closed his account-book with a little sigh, which did not escape his mother's notice. He was generally careful not to show in her presence any sign of weariness or depression. It was so hard for this woman to rise above the discouragements of later years that she wondered how it was that John and Beth could be so hopeful and light-hearted, and in her own heart she would say — "When they have the experience which I have had of the discouragements and disappointments of life, they will understand their mother's lack of faith in the 'better times' to which they are looking." Yet she was learning

to hide her sadness, and was becoming more and more interested in their plans. Beth would say — "Poor mother! No wonder she is so sorrowful. But when we get out of this wilderness she will enjoy the land flowing with milk and honey. And then if some day Joe come home, she would almost die of joy, only people do not die of a superabundance of joy."

The withdrawal of Colonel Parsons' friendship was a great grief to them all, and was likely to work disaster to their interests. John had been so used to saying, when in any doubt or perplexity — "I'll ask Colonel Parsons," or, "The colonel will advise me what is best to do," that it was very hard to remember that this hitherto friendly neighbor was no longer his friend and adviser. And there seemed no end to the annoyances and perplexities which grew out of this loss of confidence and kindly regard. John did not know how far others were influenced by the colonel's action, but he fancied that some of the neighbors treated him with less friendliness than usual. Patrick was sent to ask for the return of certain farming tools which John had been using, the colonel having said — "Keep them until you can do better for yourself. They have been hanging in the tool-house for years, for of course the men will choose the improved tools in preference to the old-fashioned ones. So you are welcome to

keep these as long as you need them." The return of these necessary implements made the purchase of new ones imperative, which decreased John's funds so alarmingly that he began to be anxious as to how they were to get through the winter. Especially did the thought of the taxes trouble him, and drew from him an unaccustomed expression of discouragement.

"Do you not think you will have enough to pay them?" asked his mother.

"I hope so; but it will leave us without a dollar, and little prospect of anything coming in before spring. No one seems to want work. If I could only get a job somewhere!" He did not add what was in his mind — that Colonel Parsons was employing several extra hands at work which he could do, and that he had expected to be employed.

"Never mind," said Beth, cheerfully. "If you have enough for the taxes we shall get along. We can live on corn-meal and potatoes, and with plenty of milk we shall fare royally. No need of our starving, even if we do not have 'store victuals'."

"True; yet there are always so many unexpected demands that it is scarcely safe to have an empty pocketbook," replied John.

"It is not safe to be in the path of a cyclone, but if one overtakes you, what can you do about it?"

The "unexpected demands" came sooner than they anticipated, and from a source which astonished them greatly. Only a few days subsequent to this conversation, two bills were presented to Mrs. Heckman. One was for work done at the blacksmith's shop in the neighborhood, under Stephen's management, two years previous. This bill was a surprise to Mrs. Heckman, as well as to John. Neither of them was aware that Stephen had left any debts behind him. The other bill was presented by Mr. Howland, and was for "merchandise." The bills were not large, yet sufficiently so to bring consternation into the Heckman household. John said —

"Of course, this bill at the blacksmith's must be settled. The point that puzzles me is why both these should come in just now with such imperative demands for immediate settlement."

He did not know then, nor indeed did he ever know, that sitting in the grocery one evening, talking over his disappointment about the purchase of the oaks, Colonel Parsons had said —

"Well, I hope they will not come upon the town for support, but with such management, it will be a wonder if they do not come to that before they die. Any way, if I had any small accounts unsecured, I would make an effort to get a settlement speedily." Then Mr. Howland remarked that Stephen had left an unsettled

account, and the colonel responded — "Send it in to Mrs. Heckman. Folks who can afford to throw away such chances as I gave them must have a mint of their own. I would be willing to back up some of you for the sake of bringing them to their senses."

It was such remarks as these, uttered carelessly in the bitterness of Colonel Parsons' anger and disappointment, that brought distress into the struggling household. There were two reasons for the colonel's displeasure. He liked to make money when he saw a good chance, and, of course, was disappointed; but the fact that his plans had been upset by a boy, and for what he considered a whim, was worse than his disappointment. Colonel Parsons was a man who could not endure to be thwarted, and it was apt to be a serious matter for any one to undertake to oppose him.

As the Heckmans talked over this new trouble, Beth said — "I think we ought to send for Stephen to come out and settle his own bills." And it was finally determined that this was the thing to do. Accordingly, word was sent to Stephen that his family wished to see him as soon as convenient. But Stephen tore up the note, and said, angrily — "I won't go. Let them manage their own affairs. They have rejected my advice until I am disgusted with their management."

As he did not go home, John determined to go to Clayborne and interview him. Stephen received his brother with a little coldness of manner, but John was prepared for this and did not appear to notice it. He said —

"Stephen, I have come down to ask about these bills. Mother says she does not know whether they are correct, and thinks you may remember about the work at the shop, and she is sure that we never had groceries from Howland's that were not paid for."

Stephen looked at the bills, and asked —

"Why do you come to me about these? I have nothing to do with business affairs at home."

"As I told you, mother wishes to know if they are just."

"Just? Why shouldn't they be? And I suppose you will pay them, as you have shouldered the establishment." And Stephen laughed; it was the old scornful laugh that always troubled John.

"Of course, if they are all right we will pay them; but, Stephen, I wish you would go out and see these men, and ask them to wait a little while until I can earn the money."

"Why should they be asked to wait? They have waited two years already."

"I know; but you see this is so unexpected

that I am not prepared to pay at once, and you observe that in both cases the demand is imperative for immediate settlement. I think that, as you are the one who contracted the debts, they would give a little more time if you asked the favor."

"It wouldn't do a bit of good. Neither of these men has any too high an opinion of me. I overheard some remarks that were made the night I broke my leg. They thought I was unconscious, but I wasn't. I understand pretty well their estimate of me."

"But, Stephen, about this bill of Mr. Howland's. Mother would like to know what they mean by 'merchandise.' You know, if this is for liquor they cannot collect it of mother, and she wants to know."

"Better ask them, if you are so anxious to find out." Stephen spoke angrily, but John replied very quietly —

"I assure you it is not a matter to get vexed about. We ought all to be interested in what concerns mother, and I cannot help thinking that you can deal with these men to better advantage than I can. It would be rather hard on mother to have a suit brought, as they threaten to do."

Stephen persisted in treating the matter as no concern of his, advised John to pay the bills as soon as he could, assuring him that there would

be no trouble, that the threats were only a scare, and finished by saying — "If you had not been so extremely notional, you might have had means to pay these demands and all others. Anybody who throws away money as you do — or the opportunities of getting it, which amounts to the same thing — cannot expect sympathy when a pinch comes."

That drive home was not soon forgotten. The boy's heart was very heavy. It would be hard to tell his mother that he had failed to gain either help or sympathy from Stephen. And what was he to do? It was not only the embarrassment of not being able to pay promptly the bills, but the dread of a law-suit. He did not think as Stephen insisted, that the threats were idle, and it seemed to him that he could never bear the disgrace of having a suit brought for the collection of these bills. Their reputation for honesty and promptness was at stake. He studied the matter all the way home. Stephen had, in the course of their talk, suggested that John might borrow the money, but who would lend it to him? He thought of stopping at Mr. Wilson's and asking him for a loan, offering to secure him by giving him a claim upon some of the farm stock, but this idea was very distasteful, though it seemed the only thing to do. He decided, however, to wait a day or two before he took any one into his con-

dence or asked any favors. To many this indebtedness of a few dollars may seem very trifling and a small thing to cause so much uneasiness, especially when the fact of the Heckmans having a large farm in their possession is taken into consideration. But we must remember that the circumstances were peculiar, that the farm had not for a long time been made a source of profit, and that in this emergency ready money, not land, was the need of the hour, and this John saw no way of obtaining upon such short notice. Again, it must be remembered that, although John was wise beyond his years in many respects, yet he was, after all, only a boy with a limited knowledge of the ways of the business world. And it is not to be wondered at that riding home in a November rain, he said to himself — "It is of no use. We might as well give up first as last. We have come to a place on the march where the way is completely hedged across, and I see no way through or around the difficulty. It was too heavy a burden to undertake to carry, any way."

But presently there stole in upon his mind a memory of an hour in the beautiful church at the old home. The words to which he had listened came back to him with the personal application so softly whispered to his own soul, and there came to him the words which the Lord spake

unto him whom He called to lead his people Israel — "Certainly I will be with thee." And he said in his heart — "If I am truly called to a lesser work, even to bear this burden which seems so heavy, surely I may claim the same promise."

Yet there seemed no possible way out. How could help come? He had studied the difficulty on all sides, and had examined every apparent loop-hole by which he might hope for deliverance, and could see no way out. Afterward, he said — "I just wonder that the Lord did not take me at my own estimate of His promise and let me go." And Beth said —

"But he couldn't, you know."

"Yes, and I am thankful for that truth."

We are apt to be like John; because we cannot see how God can help us we doubt if there be any way for Him to do it. As if we possessed an infinite knowledge of the resources of an Almighty God! And if those who have lived double John Heckman's years, and have had the experience of a long series of signal deliverances, sometimes insist upon walking by sight, shall we blame this young man who knew by actual experience little of God's power to deliver?

It was far into the night before a calm settled down upon John's soul; but at last there came, after hours of struggle with his doubts and fears,

a sweet peace — a trustful, waiting spirit. The way seemed as much hedged up as before. It was as if another Red Sea spread itself out across their chosen route. Would God interpose in their behalf?

They waited, not knowing what to do. It was two days after John's visit to Clayborne that Stephen appeared at the farm. It came out that Dr. Watson, in driving over West Hill to visit a patient, had heard some neighborhood gossip about this trouble of the Heckmans. Upon returning to his office he said, abruptly —

"Stephen, what is this trouble at home?"

"I guess nothing very much. Why?"

"I heard something about it to-day; and I know John was in to see you one day this week. I met him as he was going out, and I remember that he looked very sober; but I was so preoccupied with those fever cases on my mind, that I forgot to ask you about your family. Now I want to know what it is all about."

Stephen saw that he must tell the whole story, which he did, laying more stress upon the bill at the blacksmith's, saying — "Of course it was for mother that the work was done, but she has probably forgotten all about it."

"And the bill at Howland's?" Stephen's face flushed, and he did not reply until the doctor added — "What about that?" Then he said —

"Well, I — very likely some of it is not for things that mother ought to pay for."

"So I thought. Now to-morrow morning — I must drive to Cold Spring this afternoon — but in the morning you are to go out and settle these bills. I will advance the money and John can pay me when convenient. The bill at Howland's must be an itemized bill, and all items for liquor or anything in the way of gambling debts must be struck off. Pay for anything that is legitimate merchandise, and bring back a receipt in full. It may be a hard thing for you to do, but John must not carry all the burdens alone." The doctor gave Stephen some further directions as to how to transact the business, and went his way, leaving Stephen ashamed, yet much relieved; for he had not been so indifferent as he pretended when talking with John, and the matter troubled him greatly. Indeed, he had contemplated laying the whole story before his friend, the doctor, but had not courage to carry out the thought.

He laid Dr. Watson's proposition before John, saying —

"And he says you are to take your time for paying him back; and, John, I shall remember it, and some day, when I can earn any money, I shall pay you."

"That is all right, old fellow," was the hearty response.

The bill at the blacksmith's was paid as a matter of course, and a receipt in full taken; and Stephen fancied that the creditor seemed a little disappointed as the money was counted out and tendered him. He made no remarks further than to mutter an apology for his peremptory demand.

"It was unnecessary to threaten my mother," replied Stephen. "It was through my carelessness that the matter was allowed to run so long. Neither mother nor my brother were aware that we owed you anything."

At the saloon grocery the case was different. Stephen asked for an itemized bill. Howland replied —

"Steve, you do not want it all down in black and white?"

"Indeed, I do."

"You'll never show it to your mother?"

"Why not?"

"Because you know very well what that means for the most part."

"How should I know? It sounds as if it might mean sugar and flour, or nutmeg and allspice; but my mother wishes to know what she is paying for."

At length, seeing that Stephen was determined, Howland turned to his books and said —

"See here! Look this over; and if you insist upon the items being copied, all right."

Stephen examined the book with the flush on his face deepening; at last he said —

"You cannot expect mother to pay this bill?"

"Certainly; why not?"

"You will be disappointed, that is all."

The saloon-keeper was angry, and threatened, but Stephen was firm; if his mother owed anything for groceries, he would pay it in her name; but he had no authority to pay for liquor sold to a minor.

At the word "minor" Howland looked embarrassed, and Stephen followed up his advantage, and insisted upon a receipt in full in his mother's name. Howland recovered himself, and threatened; and in his anger said that Colonel Parsons had promised to back him if he would carry it through.

"That makes no difference," replied Stephen. "My mother has a stronger friend to back her than Colonel Parsons."

"Indeed, I don't know who it can be. The colonel is the richest and most influential man around here."

"Humph! Maybe, but the Friend who does the endorsing for mother and John does not seem to have much to do with affairs in this neighborhood; at least, He is not recognized here."

The saloon-keeper wondered at the change in Stephen's tone and manner, but there was no fur-

ther explanation; though, as the young fellow went out from what had become to him a hated place, he said to himself —

"Dr. Watson does not believe much in the Providence that mother and John trust in; but I would like to know just who managed this affair so that the doctor should find it out and take hold of it."

CHAPTER XVI.

ROYAL BOUNTY.

"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word."

MISS HAVERGAL speaks of that "which the Lord hath done for us and given us, which we never asked at all, never even thought of asking — royal bounty, with which not even a prayer had to do." If John Heckman felt that he had been "marvellously helped" when Dr. Watson was sent to turn the tide of trouble that had threatened to roll in upon him, how did he rejoice in the "royal bounty" which was presently bestowed upon him, a gift far beyond his hopes or his ambition!

When Stephen returned to Clayborne, after the settlement of the troublesome business that had been the occasion of his last visit to the farm, he was made the bearer of messages of grateful acknowledgment to Dr. Watson, and then John added —

"You can assure him that the money he has advanced will be repaid just as soon as I can get a chance to earn it. The doctor is not a rich man, and it may not be convenient for him to wait long. I wish I knew where I could get something to do to bring in a little money." Then, as Stephen was going away, John said to him — "I have been thinking that perhaps I could get some team work. If you keep a lookout, you may hear of something for me."

"All right, I will. And, John, I am interested in things here at home, for all my crossness the other day; and when I get through my studies and earn something, the first thing I do will be to give you a lift. I don't agree with you always; religion is not in my line. But if it suits you to narrow your ideas down to a few Bible rules, why, that is your business."

"Stephen, let me suggest that there is a fulness and a wideness in the Bible, which, if you would study it, you would find beyond your comprehension."

"Excuse me, then; I don't want to enter upon any investigations beyond my capacity," replied Stephen, laughing; and, gathering up the reins, he added — "Well, good-by, old fellow. Don't let things trouble you."

Later in the day the brother and sister were alone, and Beth said — "Those bills turning up

so unexpectedly make me think of old Pharaoh repenting himself of letting the Israelites go, and starting out after them. I am sure I hope that the very last one of the host is done for. Receipts in full are good sepulchres, as good as the Red Sea to wipe out the old tyrant."

"But, Beth, the debt is only transferred; we must remember that."

"Oh, that isn't worth speaking of. Our lives will not be made 'bitter with hard bondage.'" Then, dropping the light tone in which she had been speaking, she added — "But, really, do you not think it wonderful that just when we did not know where help could come from, when we were completely discouraged — at least I was, though I tried not to let mother know it — a friend in need should spring up from such an unexpected quarter?"

John's reply was in a meditative tone, more as though he were talking to himself than as a reply to his sister's question — "Our ideas are so narrow and our poor little life is sometimes hunted into a corner, or else comes plump against a wall, or plunges us into a sea of trouble, and we look upon escape as impossible. Then God steps in and does that which we thought could not be done, and He does it in such a simple way that we are amazed. What we thought was a great and insurmountable difficulty looming up before us

fades away. We find out that there was a hole in the wall against which we were pressed, and that beyond it the path is brighter and smoother."

John knew in his heart that for himself he had wider views of God's love, and a more profound belief in His power to save; but he did not say it, for he felt that Beth could not understand. Her practical applications of the events in the history of the chosen people were only to their every-day, outward life. Of the deeper spiritual meaning of the remarkable story she had little or no conception. Of the bondage of sin, of Christ as a deliverer, of the rod as a symbol of God's presence and power to save in the hour of the soul's temptation, she never thought. Views of the heavenly Canaan were swallowed up in her anticipations of the time when their home should "blossom as the rose," and West Hill, redeemed from the domination of the saloon, should be a model country neighborhood. When would she open her heart to take in the more important truths? John questioned often to himself, and ever asked that the symbolized truths of the gospel might be revealed to her. To this last remark she responded —

"But there's another way to look at it. Do you not think that people who do not believe as you do would say that there was nothing at all remarkable in the doctor's hearing incidentally of

our perplexity, and, being interested in Stephen, and himself kind-hearted, his offering to help us out?"

"Very true, there is such a way of looking at many of the wonderful things that come to us. Do you remember that more than once in the history of the chosen people God used natural forces to deliver them? Once it was an east wind; another time a flock of migratory birds. The miracle was not always in the peculiarity of the means used, but in the fitting in at just the time and place, or in the extent to which the action of the natural force was carried — the holding of the waves, the stay of the flight until the danger of the need was past. It was not the less God's hand that rolled back the waters because He worked by means. Nowadays we call God's interpositions 'special providences.' Some people profess not to believe in them. Stephen is inclined to ridicule the idea, and Dr. Watson would laugh at the thought that he was the instrument of carrying out anybody's plan but his own."

John was getting rather too serious for Beth, and she suddenly broke off the conversation, saying it was time to see about supper.

For a few days John busied himself with finishing up odd jobs of farm work, putting things in order for the winter, that there might be no hindrance to his accepting any offer of employment.

One evening he was surprised by a visit from Mr. Scott. The call was more of a surprise as he felt quite unacquainted with that gentleman, and, besides, he thought he was not in favor with him. The object of the call was presently made apparent.

"I s'pose you have never thought of teaching school?" began the visitor.

"Yes, I thought of it; but, as I cannot very well leave home, I have not spoken of it. Were it not for this hindrance, I would be glad to take charge of a small school."

"I thought so. Well, now you needn't go away from home at all. You can have the school here at the Corners, if you say the word."

"I thought you had a teacher engaged. We expected that school would open on Monday."

"So I had, so it will; but the teacher won't be the one I had engaged. You see, three weeks ago I hired a young fellow from Lincoln. I didn't feel quite satisfied with him, especially after my wife said — 'I don't see why you didn't offer the place to John Heckman.' Now a man don't like to have some one ask why he didn't do something different, particularly when he does not feel quite satisfied himself with what he has done. And I was vexed with myself that I had not thought of it sooner, and almost out of patience with my wife for not speaking before. And I just kept getting

sicker and sicker of my bargain with the Lincoln fellow, but I could not back down. However, it has turned out all right; this morning I got a letter from him asking to be released from his engagement, as he could have a place in the Academy at home. I said — 'All right, couldn't suit me better.' And I wrote to him that Lincoln could keep him if they wanted him, that we had good material of our own. And so, if you want the place, you can have it. The pay is good; I had agreed to pay the other fellow ten dollars a week for twenty weeks; and I'll give you that, though I suppose that some of the district will think that you ought to teach for less, seeing that you can board right here at home; but I don't see that it makes any difference to the district; if you choose to live on air, that is your business. Any way, I am authorized to pay that; and if you say so, it is a bargain."

"But you know I have had no experience in teaching."

"Yes, I know all about it; you never had any experience in farming, either, did you? But I don't see as that has been anything against your success. Folks that have the right stuff in them can get along without experience, according to my calculation. Any way, it is not to be bought at the stores; and, if you have it, you have got to make it out of somebody — might as well take it

out of the boys and girls here on West Hill. I reckon that they will give you a good chance at experience, with variations — musical, at that! It is a rather hard school, I'll admit; but I'll risk you, and back you up, too. Since the colonel has given you the cold shoulder, I guess it is my duty to lend you a hand when you need it. Oh, I am not going to gossip; but I have heard about the fuss, and I want you to know that I admire your grit. Maybe I should not have let the chance slip; but I can appreciate your standing for a principle, and I said to myself — 'That's the sort of a teacher we want.' The boys in this neighborhood need some principle pounded into them."

When John had signified his willingness to accept the position, Mr. Scott drew from his pocket a contract, which was filled out and signed before he left the house. Reaching home he said to his wife —

"There! Unless that young fellow makes a bigger failure than I think he is capable of doing, I don't see how this district is going to get out of paying him two hundred dollars next spring for services rendered! The colonel will have hard work to break up that contract. I thought I would make it fast, for one never knows what scheme he will concoct. He has no children to send to school; but he may interfere for all that, because he is a tax-payer."

"Well, Beth, have you anything which will fit that?" asked John after their visitor had gone.

"Not a thing! It is too big for me. I should call it a Special Providence with capitals!"

"I never hoped for anything half so good. I thought if I could earn fifty dollars extra this winter I should be satisfied; and I sometimes thought that I was wild to think of earning that amount. But two hundred dollars! Just think! But, Beth, if I should fail and make a fizzle of it!"

"You won't! You'll go through with it; I feel it."

"Your faith is sometimes stronger than mine; I don't understand you."

"Well, I understand myself, and that is all that is necessary."

"Are you sure of that? I sometimes doubt if you do understand yourself."

"I do; the truth is, my faith rests in you."

"Oh, Beth!"

"Fact! Well, perhaps I might go a little further, and say my faith is in you and your God. I mean I have faith in Him, because I believe He honors the faith of those who trust Him. See?"

"I see; but, Beth, if you believe that, why do you not trust Him for yourself?"

"Oh, it is so much easier to have a proxy!"

"But that is not the way these things stand; every soul is accountable for himself; no proxies are received at the court of the King. And, oh, Beth, does He not deal royally with us, as becometh a king?"

The next day was Saturday; and, as John was to open school on Monday, it was necessary that he should go to Clayborne that day. Beth determined to take the opportunity of making a long-promised visit at Dr. Watson's. During the summer, John had bought a second-hand buggy, so that he could now take his mother and Beth to church or for a drive. Mrs. Watson, who was much of an invalid, welcomed her young guest very cordially. Stephen being a favorite with the doctor's wife, she was prepared to like the sister. Beth was bright and intelligent, besides being very pretty. Nothing could be more becoming to the young girl in her freshness than the garnet cashmere with its velvet trimmings, and, altogether, she was a delight to Mrs. Watson. At dinner the hostess remarked that she was somewhat discouraged upon the bread question. She said — "It has been one of the trials of my invalid state that I cannot make the bread for the family. It is so seldom that I have a cook who is a good bread-maker. No matter how perfect the cooking may be in other things, the bread is almost invariably poor."

"Bread-making seems to be almost a lost art," remarked the doctor.

"I don't know about that," said Stephen. "Mother and Beth can make good bread."

"So? Can you make bread, Miss Beth?" asked the doctor.

"Indeed I can!"

"Well, Laura," addressing his wife, "I would suggest that you try to engage Miss Beth to supply us with bread."

"How would we get it? It is too far to send often."

"Have it sent in by the Lincoln stage twice a week. I have eaten bread out there, and I can testify to Stephen's veracity on this point."

"It would add much to the comfort of this family if you would take pity on us," said Mrs. Watson, addressing her guest, "and make better people of us, too; for poor bread makes dyspeptics, and dyspepsia causes people to sin easily."

"I am serious," said the doctor.

"So am I. The question is — Will Beth do it?"

"I would like to try it if mother is willing."

"Oh, mother will be willing," said Stephen. "If Beth wanted to knead the moon into loaves of bread, mother would see nothing in the way."

It was finally settled that, if Mrs. Heckman did

not object to the arrangement, Beth was to send in by the stage, twice a week, four loaves of her sweet, nut-brown bread.

Mrs. Heckman was a little doubtful as to the wisdom of the plan; but she made no serious objection, and Beth became a woman of business. Her bread gave satisfaction, and very soon she had other orders, so that two days each week she had all she could do to supply the demand. John laughingly declared that she lived with her head in the oven, to which she replied —

"If you knew how ambitious I am growing, you would say that I lived with my head in the clouds."

CHAPTER XVII.

OUTGROWING THINGS.

"But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers . . . I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes."

AND so it came about that a very busy winter for the Heckmans was setting in. I wonder just how much that brief declarative sentence conveys to your minds. Most people imagine they know what a busy life is. Young women fill in the intervals between calls and dinners and parties with creating remarkable figures in Kensington or impossible landscapes in oils; or, if musically inclined, they spend hours trying to bring out at the finger-tips the music that was left out of the soul; else they dawdle away their leisure time over novels, and think they are "very busy." Young men find that the claims of society, the club and the opera, added to the work of office hours, keep them "very busy." But for

John Heckman it meant rising in the darkness and chill of the winter mornings, building the kitchen fire, and going out, often through a blinding storm, to attend to the stock; working until schooltime, with an interval for breakfast, then spending six hours in the close, stuffy atmosphere of the school-room; returning home at four o'clock to take up the round of evening "chores"; spending the evenings after supper either in school work, or in the interest of the temperance league, or else in the work of the Circle. Saturdays were full of cutting and drawing wood from the woodlot, doing, or driving to town upon, the endless odd jobs that are constantly recurring. He foresaw, when he accepted the position, that it meant a hard pull and a long one, but he was young and vigorous and strong of soul. You say that it is not possible that a boy not yet eighteen could accomplish it all — teach school, care for the stock, cut the year's wood, besides the league and Circle work? All I can say is, that it is true; this hero of mine did all this, and he did not break down under the strain. An ordinary boy could not have done it, you insist? As to natural ability, John Heckman was not more than ordinary, but Dr. Watson spoke truly when he told Stephen that his brother had something which he had not; and when the Spirit of the Lord comes into the heart and life of a young man with His

enlightening and strengthening power, we may look for extraordinary results.

The school was large and the work hard. Nevertheless, John thoroughly enjoyed it, and the children with one voice declared that they never had a better teacher. Certain it is that the parents never before heard so much said at home about school and school work. The young teacher was enthusiastic, and his pupils caught the enthusiasm. The school had the unenviable reputation of being a hard one to manage, and hitherto the salary, which was thought to be exceptionally large for a country school, had been paid for managing, rather than for teaching. The highest recommendation that a teacher could bring to West Hill was that he could "govern" well, and some of the good people shook their heads gravely and feared that John would fail in "government." Had they known that he gave very little thought to the subject, there would probably have been still more dubious shaking of heads, and more doubtful expressions of opinion. It was not so much theory with him, as a matter of course, that he gave the pupils so much to do, and made their work so absorbing that for the most part they forgot to be mischievous; and, having won the respect and confidence of the scholars, the rest was easy. Jimmie Howland was about the age of Frank Heckman, a boy pos-

sessing a quick, active brain, but physically weak and nervous, and so timid that he was afraid of even the boys of his own age. Until that winter his mother always came to the door of the school-house with him, and the teacher was requested to send him home a few minutes before the other scholars were dismissed, so that he might not come in contact with the rougher element of the school. As might have been expected by any one understanding the nature of boys, this carefulness and exclusiveness caused the shrinking boy to become the target for all the indignities which school-boys of a certain stamp know so well how to invent and inflict. John spent a few days studying the case, and then had a quiet talk with Frank, who, proud of the trust and confidence of his brother, entered eagerly into the plans for making school-life more endurable to Jimmie. And so successfully did they push their plans that it was not many weeks before there was a marked change in the manner of the boys toward their hitherto persecuted school-mate, and the change in Jimmie, too, was quite marked. He became the devoted friend of the teacher, and maintained the position in spite of the sneers which he constantly heard at home.

"Seems to me you don't come home crying quite as often as you used to," remarked Mr. Howland one day, several weeks after school

opened. Jimmie had just come in from school, and, placing his books upon the counter, was helping himself to candy. "Are you learning to fight your own battles?"

"I don't have any to fight. We have got a teacher this winter that knows something, and when the boys do a mean thing, he makes them feel so little that they just want to crawl away out of sight. I know he would stand by me, so I am not afraid any more. And if any of them undertook to treat him as they did the teacher last winter, I'd fight on his side. I tell you, they'd better not try it."

"Well, well! So you are going to champion the young idiot!" Colonel Parsons, who, tilting his chair against the counter, had been a listener, was the last speaker. The boy replied, with a show of spirit unusual in him —

"I don't know what you mean by champion, but I know what idiot means, and I can tell you Mr. Heckman is no idiot. He knows more than all the rest of the folks in this neighborhood put together."

"In that case I should suppose he would be capable of teaching a boy like you a little manners," said the father, somewhat disturbed. It might not be politic for even a saloon-keeper to offend Colonel Parsons.

"He does try to," was the quick response;

"but I can't stand for manners when folks say things about the teacher. If I pass the examinations next time, he is going to teach me Latin, and I am going to college and study law. And then I'll go to Congress and make laws that will use up the liquor business."

"So that is the kind of teaching you have this winter! Setting boys up against their fathers' business does not seem to me very honorable," commented the colonel

"I didn't need any setting up against it. I hate the smell of the stuff, and I hate to have my father sell it. Last Fourth of July I saw it all as plain as anybody could, but I did not suppose I could do anything to help along. You see, I had not found out that there was any fight in me."

With this he gathered up his books, and went up-stairs to the family rooms.

Both men laughed as he went out, and his father said —

"Jimmie has always been such a sickly boy, that we have humored him a great deal, and allowed him to say just what he pleased. I have often told his mother that she was spoiling him. He has never been crossed at home, but I guess he has had a hard time at school, until this winter. He seems to have waked up considerably."

"He is only a child, and does not know what he is talking about; but I tell you there is a good

deal of that sort of talk going on. It is in the air, and even the children breathe it in."

"So long as it is confined to children and young fellows without influence, like Heckman, there is nothing to fear," replied the saloon-keeper. "The children will outgrow the nonsense; I have seen temperance boys and girls before."

"Yes; as these boys grow older, most of them will see that their interests demand the sacrifice of these ideas, which they now think are principles." This from the occupant of the tilted chair.

"That is true; so long as we can control the business interests of the country, we are safe from fanatics. As you say, when these boys grow older, they will be ready to see things differently; and by the time they become voters we shall have nothing to fear from them."

"Still, it might be as well to put a check on that boy's tongue," remarked the colonel, as he brought his chair to its proper position, and, taking up his package of groceries, went out.

But neither then nor ever since has any check been put upon Jimmie Howland's tongue. Neither business interest, nor the prospect of political honors or literary distinction, has the power to make him less earnest in his championship of the cause to which he so early devoted himself.

Setting Jimmie Howland upon his feet, teaching him self-respect and self-confidence, arousing

in him an ambition to be first a boy among boys, then a man among men, and awakening in him a love of study, was not the only work done during that winter's term of school, tending toward the elevation of the West Hill people. This in itself would have made that session a memorable one; but there were other boys who learned valuable lessons, whose feet were turned into an upward path through the young teacher's influence. Parents looking on knew, and sometimes spoke, of the earnest, faithful school-room work of the winter; pupils could have told of private talks and words of encouragement, hints of possibilities before them, tender warnings against evil ways, and gentle, faithful pleadings in behalf of truth and right; but who shall tell of hours spent by the teacher alone with the Master, pleading for wisdom to guide aright these hearts that he could so easily sway, and for the faith and love that would enable him to reach any that stood aloof? These hours, the history of which cannot be written, hold the secret of John Heckman's success as the teacher of the West Hill school.

The young people of the vicinity seemed to have caught the spirit of earnestness, and a zeal for study took hold of many of them. Jack Swan declared that the Hill was becoming so literary that there was no comfort in life for those who were of a different stamp; and he, utterly refus-

ing to be drawn into the world of books, spent more time than ever before at Howland's. He was there in the dusk of a winter afternoon when Fred Morgan drove up in a cutter, and, running in, asked for Jimmie. Fred had been the ring-leader of the rioters, the one boy whom former teachers had most feared; and while his usual demeanor had been commented upon, people had said — "He is biding his time. He will never let the school-master go through the term without a trial of strength." Little they knew that the trial to which they looked forward had already taken place, and that it had not been the usual test of physical force. Fred himself could not have told just when he yielded and went over to the teacher's side.

"When are you going to put him out?" asked Mr. Howland.

"Who?"

"Why, that young upstart of a teacher."

"We don't intend to put him out. We know enough to see that we have got a good teacher, and we mean to treat him well as long as he treats us as if we had souls. We are not fools."

"But I hear that he imposes upon you — doesn't give you any chance for fun."

"We never had more fun; and besides, we have found out that fun isn't all there is to get out of a living."

"Hear the philosopher talk!" exclaimed Jack. "Say, now, Fred, if you will put him out, I'll happen along and help you."

"Help us! If we wanted to do anything so mean, we could do it without your help; but, if you come, we will put you out."

"Where are you going to-night with your fancy establishment? Got your mother's afghan, too."

"We are going over to East Side district to a spelling-match. Jimmie and I are the best spellers in our school; I am going to take him and the teacher along in my cutter."

"That's where you are going, is it? Say, there is a good place just beyond Murphy's to tip over; it would be easy enough to roll the schoolmaster down the bank and give him a ducking in the ditch. I noticed this afternoon that it was half-full of water, and it won't freeze much to-night."

"Jack Swan! What do you take me for?" said the boy indignantly; "I am not such a knave as that! When I take anybody for a drive under my protection I don't turn traitor. Besides, you may as well understand that we are the schoolmaster's friends. There isn't a boy who wouldn't show fight if anybody touched him."

"Fred, I am really afraid something is the matter with you. Your folks should be warned; you might become dangerous."

"I might be dangerous under some circumstances to such fellows as you!" responded the irate Fred. Then, suddenly controlling himself, he said — "Jack, I don't blame you for supposing that I would be ready to listen to your schemes for playing a trick on Mr. Heckman; but you may as well understand that I am done with that sort of thing."

"It looks as though we had another saint amongst us," said Jack, turning away with a laugh to answer a call from some of his set in the card-room. Presently Jimmie appeared, his mother following him with extra wraps and cautions regarding exposure. These Jimmie was inclined to reject, saying he was tired of being coddled like a baby.

"It is not cold, Mrs. Howland," said Fred. "I do not think you need be anxious; it is thawing."

"Yes; and it is just the dampness that is bad for Jimmie's throat."

"But, mother, I haven't had a touch of sore throat this winter. I am outgrowing it."

A thoughtful person would have said that sore throats were not the only things that the boy was outgrowing.

As the winter wore away, and there was no outbreak of insubordination in school, and the trustee was not once called in to settle a difficulty, that gentleman chuckled, and congratulated

himself again and again upon his own appreciation of John's good qualities that had led him to the choice; and I am sorry to say that he never once thanked his wife for the suggestion. In fact, I am inclined to think that he thought the idea originated with himself.

Of course there were grumblers; there are chronic grumblers everywhere. There were those who, as Mr. Scott had prophesied, complained of high wages paid to a young man without experience. To these Mr. Scott made reply by asking — "What good did experience do the teacher we employed last winter? He had a new experience here when the boys put him out of the school-house and locked the doors."

When it was noised about that a Latin class was to be formed there was more grumbling. There were those who said that the teacher was paid for giving instruction in common branches, and that they did not propose to pay for time spent in teaching a few pupils Latin. It was taking time from those who did not wish to take up the study; public schools were not the place for such things. It was the same question that is being discussed in more august bodies than those which convened in grocery, saloon or blacksmith shop at West Hill. But when it was known that the Latin class recited out of legal school hours, there was no chance for complaint;

and the whole ground must needs be gone over once more in the search for a legitimate cause of complaint. Finally the fault-finders seemed to have become discouraged; and teacher and pupils became more and more absorbed in their work. The Latin class was a delight to John, though, as he listened to the repetition of the familiar declensions and conjugations, sad thoughts were awakened of his own interrupted studies. But bravely he put these aside, saying — "Though I do not go to college myself, it looks as though I might send half a dozen or so in my place; and there are boys in this school who will yet be heard from."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MINORITY REPORT.

"And Caleb said, ... Let us go up at once and possess it."

MEANTIME there were taking place in the neighborhood other events of interest, which demonstrated the truth that we do not stand alone. The threads of our lives are so interwoven with other lives that whatever affects the color or texture of our web may change the tint or fibre of theirs. And the sudden snapping of the cord of friendship between the Heckmans and Colonel Parsons was not without complications. Especially the plans of the young people were disarranged. Schemes which had been projected, and which the colonel was expected to further, had to be given up because of the widening breach.

In pursuance of their resolve to observe appropriately in some public manner all the holidays,

they had arranged for a Thanksgiving dinner to be given at the colonel's house. It was to be a real old-fashioned dinner, with old-time dishes served upon old-time crockery, as far as possible. For weeks the girls had been studying the old stained and yellowed manuscript cook-books of the mothers and grandmothers, and many test dishes were set before the families of the neighborhood, who patiently breakfasted, dined and supped upon the results of the efforts of these experimental cooks. Rob Davis came into the committee meeting one evening saying — "We have all been suffering at our house from an attack of dyspepsia. Lizzie has been feeding us on 'lady cake' and 'Marlborough tarts.' The cake had a heart of stone, and the tarts — well, I hope our dispositions will not become of the same degree of tartness."

However, successes as well as failures in this line were reported, and the fame of the young cooks having spread, it was expected that many people would be glad to be spared the trouble of getting an elaborate dinner at home, and would at the same time enjoy the social gathering of friends and neighbors. The affair was in charge of the temperance league, the profits to go into their treasury. Colonel Parsons was not a member of the league, but so long as its work did not directly interfere with his business interests, he

favored the plans of the young people. To his mind there was no immediate connection between opening his house for what he called "a rousing good time" and the annihilation of the liquor traffic. He did not look for anything to come of it beyond the pleasure of a neighborhood gathering. Perhaps in his heart he was a little proud of the distinction of being known as the patron of a wide-awake set of young people. But the disagreement with John changed the tenor of his thought, and made him the avowed enemy of any plan in which his former favorite was interested. He said the young people might have a dinner at his house — for that matter, he had just as lief get up a dinner for them — but no Heckman, nor, indeed, any member of that temperance league, need look for a welcome. In consequence, the plan was quietly dropped, and the people of West Hill ate their Thanksgiving dinners at home. It is to be hoped that Colonel Parsons enjoyed his.

Some time previous to this, at a meeting of the league, a committee was appointed to devise means by which they might, if possible, rid themselves of the presence of the grocery saloon in their midst. The opposition of the leading man in the community was not without its effect upon the membership of the league, and many silently withdrew from any active part in the organization; and when, early in December, the commit-

tee reported, it was to the effect that nothing could be done. The saloon was to them a walled city, intrenched in law, bristling with battlements from which license flags floated, defended by giant politicians. And, indeed, they were not sure that it was not a necessity and a benefit to the community. The store was certainly a great accommodation, and it could not be made profitable without the added business of liquor-selling. And, any way, they said — "Everything is against us. We are weak, unable to contend against the liquor fraternity; as well might a grasshopper contend with a giant."

"Humph!" It was Beth who uttered this exclamation. She was only wondering if the speaker intended to quote Scripture. But Rob had another thought, which he expressed —

"Out West an army of grasshoppers is not looked upon as a very insignificant foe to contend with."

The committee paid no heed to these side remarks, but concluded their report by advising a quiet submission to the necessary evil, and recommending that the league should confine itself to the quiet circulation of the pledge, judicious distribution of literature, and the holding of occasional gospel temperance meetings.

There was, however, a minority report. Two of the committee disagreed with the majority.

They said that, although the difficulties were great, they believed they were "able to overcome." If the people of West Hill were determined that no liquor should be sold in their midst, and should so resolve, the matter could be carried through. Although the larger number accepted the conclusions of the majority report, there were a few who agreed with the minority, and were quite disinclined to abandon all effort to free themselves from what they felt to be a curse to their community. But in vain these few zealous ones set forth the fact that the saloon was destroying the comfort and happiness of their homes, the peace and prosperity of their neighborhood; that by its work mothers and wives and sisters were carrying about broken hearts; that children were suffering for food and clothing, and being robbed of the birthright of childhood, a father's tender love and happy memories of home joys. The report was accepted and its recommendations adopted, and the meeting adjourned.

"This neighborhood has come to a Jordan," said Beth.

"What do you mean?" asked John, taking the batter-spoon from her hand and giving a vigorous beating to the bread-sponge she was mixing.

"I mean just what I say. Over on the other side is a condition of things to be desired — temperance, morality, peace and prosperity. As a

neighborhood we have come pretty near the crossing, and that roll of the waves, along with the story of the spies, frightens the people; they are afraid. You know how it was, and it is just so here. We won't go over, we are just going to settle down and stay in the wilderness. Mr. Scott wants to circulate the pledge and educate the children, so that, the springs being cut off, the river will go dry of itself; Colonel Parsons don't want to go over at all, because the business prospects in his line are not so good over there; and, the funniest of all, Mr. Davis thinks we must wait until they build a sort of bridge. And it isn't a bridge at all, but just something thrown part of the way across, from which we can jump over upon the other bank. It hasn't been tested yet, but they are going to try it in Chicago or somewhere, and if it works it will be the thing to do. Meantime we must do the best we can to guard our homes and our friends from falling into the power of the enemy."

"But, Beth, you know what they say is true — the law is on the side of the saloon."

"The law does not say that Howland shall keep a saloon in this neighborhood; it allows him to do so if the people consent. The people ought not to consent."

"How many men do you think would sign a protest?" asked John.

"I don't know; but we will know before long just how many will."

A few days after this, a quarrel at Howland's, which came to a fight and sent one of the young men of the vicinity home with a bruised head, somewhat aroused the people, and at a special meeting of the league it was determined to act upon Beth's idea and find out just how many were willing to sign a petition to have the place closed.

Very quietly and very diligently they worked. After more than one "whereas," setting forth the grievances, the petitioners begged that for humanity's sake Mr. Howland would desist from his business of dealing out strong drink. This petition was signed by nearly every woman and young girl in the neighborhood. So quickly and quietly had the work been done that Mr. Howland was surprised at being waited upon by a large delegation, headed by several young ladies. Beth Heckman asked permission to read to him a paper which she held in her hand, and he courteously gave permission.

As she finished reading, she handed him the paper with its list of names, asking him to look at them. He took it, but laughed derisively, saying —

"Do you suppose I will throw away my means of getting a living for the whims and prayers of

a few women? Why, you haven't a name on this paper besides women. You couldn't get a man to sign it; men know better. Women are fools, anyway."

Beth and Lizzie stepped aside as Dean Wilson came forward.

"Mr. Howland, I was one of your best customers not so very long ago, but I have seen my folly, and to-day you must number me with those of whom you speak so contemptuously. I ask you to look at this list."

It was another string of facts tersely put, and a list of names which astonished the proprietor of the house. This was signed by men — men of influence in the community; and right alongside the names of men who never patronized the saloon were found the names of several staggering, reeling drunkards, men who longed in their better moments to be free from the power of the saloon.

"How many more of these petitions do you expect me to listen to before I turn you all out-of-doors?" was the angry inquiry.

"We expect you to listen to reason, so that there will be no need of any further petitioning," replied Dean, quietly.

The formality of presenting the written petitions over, women with pale, wan faces, with eyes sunken from privation and dimmed with tears,

came forward to plead their cause — to plead for their husbands and their sons.

"It is humiliating," said a looker-on, "that in this nineteenth century, in a civilized, not to say Christian, community, women should be forced to plead with men for their homes and their happiness. The law-makers should see to this. One could scarcely blame these sufferers if they took desperate measures to rid themselves of the enemy of their homes."

"This scene has made a thorough temperance man of me," was the declaration of another looker-on. "I tell you, it shakes a man up to look at Mrs. Swan pleading with that hard man for her husband and son."

It was of no avail so far as they could see. Howland laughed scornfully. He had a license. "Go to the law-makers," he said. "I am not such an idiot as to throw away my chances of making money for the whims and requests of a lot of crazy-headed fanatics."

"Mr. Howland, have we our answer?" asked Dean Wilson.

With a volley of profanity Howland assured them that nothing could change him.

"Do not be too sure of that," replied Dean. "You should remember that the Lord Almighty is on the side of a righteous cause, and the anger of Jehovah is something to think of."

"I have heard things like that before, but nothing ever comes of it." And Mr. Howland turned carelessly away, as if to end the interview. But Dean Wilson laid his hand upon the man's arm and said —

"I wish that you had decided differently, for the day will come when you will wish you had listened to our pleadings." His hand was rudely shaken off, and the man only laughed scornfully.

As they walked home John said — "Well, Dean, it has turned out as you expected, I suppose. We knew in our hearts that nothing would come of it."

"Something has come of it," said the other.

"How do you mean! We have succeeded in making him very angry."

"What I mean is this: We are stronger as a temperance organization; we have shown ourselves ready to do hard, disagreeable things. We have seen something of the misery of drunkards' families, and something of the hardness of drunkard-makers. And Howland is more than angry; he is disturbed. He knows that there is a strong power behind him, and he realizes that there is a stronger behind us."

People were astonished at the stand that Dean Wilson was taking in the affairs of the neighborhood. Since that evening when he turned back to the Heckman parlor, instead of following Jack

Swan and Stephen, a change had come over him; not all at once, but so gradually that none thought to date it from any special point or event. Since the organization of the C. L. S. C., the change had been more marked. There was amongst them all no more enthusiastic worker or more earnest student. A new element seemed to have entered into his character.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRAYER.

"Canst thou by searching find out God?"

IT was past the midnight hour, and still John Heckman sat in his room with bowed head and a heavy heart. Two events of the day which had just turned into yesterday had combined to cause the burden he was bearing to press very heavily upon him. Mr. Munson had, as he expressed it, "borne his cross" in speaking to John in regard to his "duty as a Christian to let his light shine amidst the darkness of West Hill." He managed to be passing the school-house just as the day's session closed, and going in, said —

"I have been wanting an opportunity to speak to you; it seems to me you are making a mistake with all these societies and circles, that are only just worldly affairs. As a Christian, you ought to introduce some religious service here. I told Dean when he was at our house that if it were a

prayer-meeting you were starting here I should quite approve. Excepting yourself, I suppose there is not a praying man in the neighborhood. It is a sad state of affairs."

"I know," replied John; "but how can we have a prayer-meeting if there are none to pray? I would be willing to join any one in undertaking to sustain such a service. Would you come up here and start a prayer-meeting?"

"Oh, I do not feel that I am called to the work! My duty is to our church at Clayborne; the church is in a low state and needs my help; and that is another thing I wanted to speak to you about — your duty to the church. I never see you and your mother at prayer-meeting on Wednesday evenings. A young man ought to be more particular about attending upon the ordinances of God's house."

"Mr. Munson, you must remember that we live nearly two miles farther from the church than you do, and that we have heavy cares laid upon us here at home. I do not see how it would be possible for me to go to Clayborne for the mid-week service without neglecting other duties."

"Duties never conflict," said Mr. Munson, solemnly.

"So I think; it may be that I have a duty here which I have not taken up. I do not see my way to it just yet; but I have wished that some

one might come out here and start a Sunday School."

"Young man, you cannot lay your duty over upon some one else's shoulders."

"Nor do I wish to; I only want to know that it is my duty."

"How can it be otherwise? We are commanded to let our light shine. And you, standing alone here, ought to be a light to illuminate the whole of this darkened community."

"And do you think that trying to sustain a prayer-meeting alone is the only way I can let my light shine?" asked John, smiling.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Your daily walk and conversation should set forth the beauty of the gospel. But as a means of grace to this community a public service seems important."

John was silent. He could not tell this man of the seed he was dropping into hearts here and there; indeed, he did not know himself all that he was doing by his earnest, consistent life; he did not know that his sacrifices for principle would yet bear abundant fruit. Mr. Munson did not know of the agencies set in motion, which were quietly uplifting the tone of society at West Hill. Had he known of the burden already resting upon the heart of his young friend, of how often the people of the neighborhood were borne before the Lord by this faithful servant, he might have

spoken only words of encouragement; or if not — and I am not sure that he knew how to speak encouraging words — he might at least have been more tender in the "discharge of his duty." He was a little disappointed in the result of the interview; but he told his wife that he had done his part, and his conscience was clear. And John, humiliated and seeming to hear a voice saying — "This thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone" — went about his work in great heaviness of heart.

It was the evening for the Circle. Beth, eager and enthusiastic as usual, found John disinclined to talk, and wondered a little thereat. Once or twice during the evening John caught a gleam in Tom Munson's eyes, which was partly amusement and partly sympathy; and when they were breaking up, Tom whispered —

"Never mind, old fellow! I heard father telling mother something about his call. I suspect the interview was not very inspiriting to you. But just keep on your own gait; you are all right. Father means well, but he don't understand you. Some day when I have a chance I'll tell you something encouraging."

These sentences, uttered with a half-serious, half-comic air, made John smile in spite of his depression, and Tom seemed satisfied with the result of his effort at consolation.

Beth walked home with Rob and Lizzie, while John remained behind to finish his work of looking over school exercises. It was nearly eleven o'clock when he was through and ready to go home. Meantime, Mamie Howard declined the company of the members of the Circle who were going her way, saying —

"Clarence is waiting for me at the store." Going in to inquire for him, she was told that he would be ready in a few moments; would she step into Mrs. Howland's sitting-room and wait?

"Thank you, but if he will be ready soon I will wait here." And she waited, until presently Clarence himself came from the back room, saying —

"Mame, why don't you go home with the others? I am not going yet awhile."

"But, Clarence, the others have gone; and besides, you told me that you would go with me if I would stop here."

"Well, I am not ready. You go up and sit with Mrs. Howland until I am ready."

In vain she urged that it was late, and that Mrs. Howland would not want to sit up for her. Clarence would not yield, and she would not go without him; so she waited, sitting for a while with Mrs. Howland, and then going down to try to coax him away.

"Can't you send him home?" she entreated of Mr. Howland.

"Why, that would hardly be courteous, would it?" he asked with a wicked laugh.

"It would at least be human," she responded, bitterly.

"Now, my young friend, if you are going to undertake this job of escorting your brother home whenever he stays out longer than your puritanical notions allow, you will have to nerve yourself to meet disagreeable things. You must be aware that at this hour we are not used to lady visitors."

Bravely she stood her ground and waited, until at last, Howland, seeing she would not go without him, advised Clarence to go, saying it was about time to close up. Mame thought she was glad to get out into the night, but she found it was no light task she had undertaken. Clarence staggered along in the half-trodden path through the snow, seeming about to fall at every step. The night was very cold, and their progress was so slow that the girl was becoming benumbed with the cold.

"What shall I do?" she said within herself. Just then, John, having locked the door of the school-house, stepped out from the shadow of the building into the bright moonlight. Recognizing him, she called out —

"Oh, John! Will you help me?"

Checking his rapid strides, he turned to meet a face pale with terror.

"Why, Mame! How is this? Have you not been home?"

"No; I have been waiting for Clarence."

"Waiting! Where?"

"At Howland's. I could not go home without him. Mother would be so anxious."

John had taken the stumbling young man by the arm, and was with some difficulty guiding his uncertain steps, trying to sustain the swaying form. It was a slow and wearisome walk. Clarence leaned bodily upon his escort, and once or twice stumbled and fell in spite of John's efforts to hold him up.

They made no effort at conversation after those few explanatory sentences, and at length, almost exhausted, they reached Mr. Howard's door, and with some difficulty succeeded in getting Clarence up the steps and into the house.

"Can I do anything more?" asked John, after they had disposed of the almost unconscious young man upon the couch in the sitting-room.

"I think not," replied Mame, the color coming back to her face, though she was still quivering in every nerve. "You have done me a great service. I cannot thank you as I would like to. I am sure I could never have brought him home by myself."

"Mame, has this happened before?"

"He has never been so helpless as to-night. I

have been after him two or three times this winter, and he has been willing to come; but to-night Jack Swan kept urging him to one more game, and kept filling the glasses. Of course Howland did not sell Clarence any liquor while I was there. He is very cautious."

"It is hard that we have to endure this thing," said John.

"Yes; and, as he said the other day, he has everything on his side."

"Not everything. We have God."

"We claim to have God on our side, but He does not seem to care." Her tone was bitter, and she accompanied her words by a little gesture of impatience.

"I don't like to hear you say that."

"How can I help it? Here's my only brother; look at him in there! And I am utterly powerless against this giant enemy. There isn't a single thing I can do, and as things are, there is no one with an arm strong enough to save him. God could crush this enemy as easily as I could crush a worm under my feet, but He lets the work of ruin go on. I do not understand Him."

"His ways are 'past finding out.' Sometimes we can see the meaning of His dealings, but I think we are oftener in the dark, and must just trust in His love, believing that He will do what is best. We cannot see the end of things."

"I know; and you people say the right will prevail at last. But what good will it do me after my dear one is ruined, and our home and happiness destroyed?"

"Mame, in the olden time there was one who, in the midst of suffering, said—'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'"

She shook her head very sadly, as she said, hopelessly—

"I don't understand it at all. It seems to me like a want of feeling when any one can talk like that. This faith that you Christians make so much of must be a comfortable thing, but I should not want to get where I was willing to be crushed under such sorrow as this."

What could he say to her? He was only a boy, with a boy's experience and a boy's knowledge of the needs of the human heart, and he seemed to have no message given him for this girl in her sorrow. He wanted to bring to her some tender, loving promise out of God's word, but none that seemed suitable came to him, and he only said, as he was leaving—

"Mame, once when the disciples were in deep sorrow they 'went and told Jesus.' I wish you would go and tell Him."

John was perplexed and troubled. Here was a young heart struggling with a heavy burden, not knowing where to lay it down, and he, knowing,

had not been able to tell her in language which she could understand. It had been so long since he had had any one with whom he could speak familiarly of spiritual things that it had become difficult for him to express himself, and he realized that he had failed miserably in his attempt to help Mame in her sorrow.

It was past midnight when he reached home. Beth was awake, and called out—

"Why, John, I was just thinking about going after you. Isn't it very late?"

"Rather; but I found things to do which I did not expect. I am sorry you have been worried. Good-night," and he passed on to his room, thinking—"Hers is a light anxiety compared with Mame's. I suppose at the worst she would only imagine that I might be sick. I trust she will never have that other anxiety about any one dear to her."

In the silence and chill of that winter night there came over him a sense of loneliness such as he had never known. Mr. Munson's call and its object seemed to him unwarranted and uncalled-for. It was hard, when he thought he was doing all he could, and was working against such odds, both in his efforts to lift the family out of their financial straits, and in his school work, and in the effort to advance the public interests, to be thus rebuked for not doing more. But, while he

looked upon it as an unjust criticism rather harshly put, he knew that it had in it some truth, so that, unwelcome though it was, he could not put it aside entirely. He realized as never before that as a Christian he stood alone among the young people. Even Beth, who entered so eagerly into all his schemes for improvement and progress at home and in the neighborhood, who even left him far behind in her enthusiasm and zeal, who was full of plans and methods and expedients to further their prosperity, and who labored earnestly that the intellectual and moral status of the community might be elevated, stopped there. She could not enter into the spiritual life which was to him the essence of life itself. In his approaches to the mercy seat he must go alone, because she would stop outside. In his longing he cried out — "If I had just one Christian friend to work with me, I could go forward with courage. They were ready enough to join a temperance society and a literary circle, but were I to propose a prayer circle, there would not be one to join. Mr. Munson thinks I have been putting the intellectual before the spiritual. Perhaps I have in appearance, but it was only because I have not known how to introduce the other, not because I undervalue it. I have set a high moral standard before my pupils, hoping to lead them step by step up to Christ." And there

in the darkness he waited long before the Lord, praying again and again this prayer — "Send some one here to help, some fisher of men who may know how to reach out and gather in the souls. Is there not among thy children some one to send?"

Again was the promise to be verified — "Before they call I will answer." God was already answering that prayer of His servant, and in a way that John would never in his wildest imaginings have planned. And yet the way was easy and simple and straightforward, as God's ways always are.

CHAPTER XX.

HEARD WHILE YET SPEAKING.

"And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."

DEAN WILSON had been absent from home for a week or two. At a point in his homeward journey he entered a railway coach that was well filled with young people — young men and young women — many of whom wore badges the meaning of which he could not make out.

He caught snatches of conversation which interested and puzzled him. Said one —

"Do you know who is to lead the lookout committees' conference?"

"Mr. Smith; I think he is a good leader, and I am sorry that none of our committee will be present."

And again — "Have you begun to plan for the National?"

Another asked — "Do you use the uniform topics?" and the reply was — "Well, no; we are not using them this year; we selected from them, and put in others which the committee thought better suited to our needs; but I cannot say that I think we bettered the matter. You are using them, I suppose?"

"Yes; we think it is such a pleasant idea, and we find the topics very well adapted to our wants."

"Do you have a hand-shaking committee?" asked a bright young fellow, shaking hands right and left.

"I wonder what it is all about!" said Dean within himself.

Presently a young man took the vacant seat beside him, remarking — "I observe that you wear the C. L. S. C. pin. Allow me to claim kinship." Whereupon they shook hands, and plunged into an animated conversation regarding the Chautauqua idea, discussing the course for the year, the memoranda, the seals, the widening of the circles, and other matters connected with the scheme. The stranger had visited Chautauqua, and had been present on Recognition Day, and he had a very fascinating way of describing the unique exercises of that day of days. He told of the gathering of the "clans" from all nations and climes; of the procession; of the Messenger with

the Keys, of the Golden Gate, the entrance of the graduating class to St. Paul's Grove, the passing of the arches and the welcome; of the Hall in the Grove; of the watch-fires and the Round Tables; of the public Recognition — all of which was of absorbing interest to Dean.

After a while, when these two began to feel as if they had known each other always, the stranger, who had given his name as Fields, said — "And are you a C. E., too?" touching his badge as he spoke.

"No; and what is more, I do not even know what the letters signify."

The other laughed pleasantly. "We flatter ourselves that we have spread over the continent pretty well; but it appears that there are places where we are yet unknown."

"Oh, my ignorance is no indication that you are not famous, nor is my lack of familiarity with the symbols very strange; I have only lately begun to take an interest in things of this sort. I have never happened to come upon this in my reading. There may be a C. E., as you call it, in our vicinity, for aught I know."

And now another long talk followed; this time more earnest and in more serious vein than before, as if the topics touched a lower depth in the heart. Dean was interested in the story of his new friend, as he told how from a bit of seed-

sowing in the Master's name, in a parsonage parlor in an Eastern city, this organization had grown up and spread all over the country, until in many localities a church without a Society of Christian Endeavor was the exception.

Dean said afterwards — "He took it for granted that I was a Christian, and I found it growing more and more difficult to undeceive him, and I finally gave it up and sailed along under false colors."

Presently a bright thought struck this enthusiastic Christian Endeavorer.

"I think you said you would be obliged to wait several hours in the city for a train out on your road? As I said, we are on our way to a district conference, and you must come with us; I am sure you will find the exercises interesting, and you may get something worth taking home with you. If the thing is new to you, it will be the more interesting."

Dean would have declined this invitation on the plea of being a stranger and not a member of the organization; but Mr. Fields urged the matter, saying — "You are not a stranger; you and I are old friends of two hours, standing! Besides, no one remains long a stranger in Christian Endeavor circles."

And thus it happened that Dean Wilson, to his great astonishment, found himself at a religious

gathering. He had never before in all his life made one of an assembly of this character. He sometimes went to church, but by no means regularly. He had as a boy gone to Sunday School now and then, but his knowledge of Christianity as a force in the hearts of men, of methods of Christian work, or of the aims of the workers, was exceedingly limited. No wonder he was surprised to find himself at a Christian conference, but what surprised him even more was to be treated as an honored guest, being introduced as — "My friend, Mr. Wilson, from Clayborne."

Now this was rather an unusual position for a young man who had never been claimed as anybody's friend, who had scarcely ever in his life been called "Mr. Wilson," and whose presence had never been of sufficient importance anywhere to make his place of residence a matter worth mentioning. Inwardly he chuckled a little over "the mistake" they were making; but he followed his friend Mr. Fields into a pew near the front, and gave grave and proper attention to the services.

Naturally intelligent and quick-witted, he was able to grasp the situation, and to get the drift of things in the business sessions, as well as to follow the speakers in their line of thought. When he had listened to a hundred or more young people speaking in rapid succession of their love of Christ and devotion to His service, and when he

had heard the brief but telling reports of the delegates from many local societies, the thought came to him that these young people seemed to consider it an honor and a privilege to call themselves Christians, and to delight in the service of Christ. He said to himself — "I have not heard anything about religion as something to die with; but they all seem to be living it right along, and to think that is what it is for. Instead of being ashamed or afraid to show it, they rather glory in it. I do not believe that any of them ever lived in a place like West Hill, where being a Christian would mean being a target for sneers and ridicule. Yet there's John; but then, he has not lived there all his life, and people have never known him except as a Christian."

Again he thought — "I have not heard a gloomy thing so far. They are as cheerful a set of people as I ever saw together. Up our way people seem to think that religion is something which is more comfortable to have as little of as possible until one comes to die, and then he needs to get hold of all he can. It appears that I have been holding wrong ideas about it; but then, how should I know? I have never known many Christians intimately. There's John; he is like these people; he has the same look on his face. I just wonder how Mr. Fields came to mistake me for one. I haven't that look."

The programme was varied, and each new exercise was more interesting than the one before it. Gradually his growing absorption in the proceedings caused him to forget the novelty of his position, and by the time the slips were passed, that questions might be prepared for the "Drawer," Dean Wilson had come to feel that he some way belonged to the conference, and had decided that the train might go without him. Any way, they did not expect him home until to-morrow, and he might as well stay to see it out. He stayed; and he wrote out a question which he dropped in with others with the thought — "There, I wonder what can be said to that! I think it will puzzle their wise heads."

A bright, energetic young man handled the questions with unusual ability; and sometimes, as an important question called it out, with great seriousness. Presently he read out Dean's question — "Given, a hamlet four or five miles from any church, the people not attending any religious service, and among a large number of young people only one Christian — a young man; would there be any chance for Christian Endeavor work there?"

When Dean wrote that question he was thinking of John Heckman, and wondering whether, if John knew about this organization, he would not want to start a society at West Hill.

The leader said — "That appears at first thought both an unusual case and a discouraging one; yet I should say to that young man, *Organize!*" The peculiar emphasis upon that last word caused a ripple of laughter to run through the audience, but the speaker went on earnestly — "The constitution would necessarily have to be adapted to the locality; but if any number of these young people would be willing to join, even as associate members, a society having for its avowed object the promotion of Christian growth, it would be a blessed thing to gather them in." After a few more earnest words, he added — "I will ask the one who wrote that question to grant me an interview at the close of this session."

"Likely I will!" thought Dean. "I'll get right out of this as soon as it is over; there's no telling what absurd thing I will get into if I stay much longer. I'll slip away at the first opportunity."

But he did not; whether it was some solemn words spoken in answer to other questions, or whether it was the tender and sweet closing exercise, I do not know; more probably, however, it was the gentle influence of the Spirit of God, working, it may be, through these agencies, that induced him to give up his plan of hurrying away. Instead, he went forward, and in the midst of the general handshaking he found an opportunity to say quietly to the last speaker —

"I believe you wanted to see me."

"Oh, you are the one I am looking for! Yes, I wanted to ask you if you do not think there might be others who, when the test came, would be willing to take a stand beside you for Christ?"

Then, as Dean hesitated, seeming to be, as he really was, at a loss for a reply, the other continued — "I think you are Mr. Wilson from Clayborne, or near there? Well, I am going to Lincoln in a week or two; and if I can be of any assistance to you, it is not far out of my way to visit you, and I hope that we may find some others willing to confess Christ."

Dean Wilson felt that the time had come when he must undeceive these people. At least, he must explain to this gentleman. He managed to stammer out —

"You misunderstand me; I did put in that question, but I am not the young man referred to. I was thinking of a freind of mine."

"Oh, the neighborhood to which you refer is not where you live? I see!"

"Yes, I live there."

The puzzled look that swept over the face of the young man, who still held his hand in a close grasp, would have amused Dean Wilson at almost any other time; but he was himself too much perplexed with the situation to notice it. For once he was quite unable to think of anything to say.

"And you are not the Christian young man? Do you mean to say that you are not a Christian?" was the next inquiry.

"I mean to say just that."

For a moment the two young men stood looking into each other's faces. In one the puzzled expression was giving place first to a disappointed, then a longing, expression; while the cheeks of the other flushed slightly with embarrassment at the position in which he found himself. At length the silence was broken.

"Mr. Wilson, let me ask you what is to hinder you from giving yourself up now and here to the service of Christ, so that you may go home and add your influence as a Christian to that of your friend? That neighborhood needs more than one young Christian to light up the darkness. Is there anything to hinder?"

He waited for a reply, and Dean said slowly —

"Your question appears to imply that it would be a very easy thing to do; but I should say that there might be a very great deal in the way."

"Come with me where we can be alone a few moments" — leading the way to a little room back of the platform. Then with his hand laid upon Dean's shoulder, he said — "Now what is the first thing that comes to you as being in the way of your becoming a follower of Christ?"

"I should say not wanting to do it would be

the first hindrance," said Dean, speaking with a little hesitation, as if he might not be quite certain that this obstacle had not already faded away.

"You do want to do this thing; you have been with us through this conference, and you have heard of the work which young Christians are doing, and you have longed to have this same work going on in your own neighborhood. You have thought to put the responsibility upon your friend, who is a Christian; but do you not see that it is you to whom the message has come? And if you are not ready for work, then you must get ready, and your first step is to consecrate yourself to the service of Christ."

"A person who has lived the sort of life that I have is not fit to engage in work for the Lord."

"You are going to leave the old life behind you. And besides, you have been planning to work for Him by proxy. You were going to carry home with you the information you had gathered here; and after trying to impart to your friend the enthusiasm and inspiration of the meeting, you thought to set him to work! It won't do for you to talk about not being ready to engage in any sort of Christian work; you began to work when you put that question in the basket."

"But I know almost nothing about religion; you cannot imagine how ignorant I am of the Bible!"

"Yes, but you are going to study it after this. And if you will decide to come to Christ you will know of religion experimentally. You now know that it is but to turn away from yourself and look to Him. He is ready now to pardon your past and give you grace for the future. The life of a Christian seems to you more desirable than ever before; why not enter upon it?"

"I do not feel prepared for the step; I have not thought of it until within the last hour. I suppose I have expected to turn about and live differently sometime, but I have not thought seriously of taking such a stand as you suggest. It seems to me that some preparation is needed in my case."

"What preparation can you make? You cannot pardon your own sins; you cannot even turn away from sin in your own strength; you will never be any more ready than you are at this minute."

"But I have never prayed; I do not know how."

"Well, you are going to begin now, I trust. I tell you, my friend, Christ stands ready to supply all your need, to do all for you. Let us come to Him now and give ourselves up to His service, to be and to do as He shall direct. Will you?"

A few moments they stood there in breathless silence; from one heart earnest prayer was going

up, while in the other a fierce conflict was going on. Very unexpectedly had this question come up for settlement. All through the sessions of the conference the conviction had been fastening itself upon him that he had been leading a very worthless sort of a life and that these young men and women knew how such worthlessness could be redeemed, and life be made worth living. The zeal and enthusiasm which they exhibited in regard to the Christian life astonished him, and convinced him that there was a deeper meaning to it all than he had fathomed. He had about made up his mind to look into it, and some time he would perhaps try that way of living; but he had not intended to settle the matter then and there. But he seemed held to the point; he must decide one way or the other; he was not ready to say that he would have nothing to do with this thing, and he seemed to hear a sweet, tender voice calling upon him to yield at once.

"Christ calls. He waits!" was the softly spoken entreaty of his friend. "Will you not enter upon his service?"

Dean raised his eyes from the floor, and looking straight into the face of the other, said, firmly — "I think there is nothing I want to do so much as that!"

The young people went home from the conference and told of the good time they had; they

spoke of the earnestness and enthusiasm of the delegates, of the spiritual tone of the addresses, of the encouraging reports from local societies, and of the solemn appeals to more consecrated service. Many went home with higher resolves and more earnest purposes; but only a few knew of the very best of the conference — a soul brought into the kingdom, a worker enlisted, another influence brought to bear for the regeneration of West Hill; another preacher of the gospel called.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEAN BEGINS HIS WORK.

"We have found him. . . . Come and see."

HOW to tell the rest! How to portray the emotions of a soul just born into the Kingdom! Dear Christian friend, do you remember how it was with you when first you opened your heart to receive the heavenly Guest? Do you remember how your soul was all flooded with the sunlight of His love? Most of the precious things of the religion of Christ were all unknown and untried, even undreamed of. Of the sweet peace that abides even when we descend into the valleys, of the conflicts and the triumphs through Christ, of the joy of communion with our Lord, of the wonderful life of oneness with Him, of all that grows out of an entire consecration, Dean Wilson was utterly ignorant. He was not at all familiar with the language of Christians; he had not known many Christians, and those he had known

had been to him incomprehensible; he was just beginning to understand them vaguely; everything was so strange that he could not at once take it all in; but of one thing he was certain; one thing he could comprehend even at this early period of his Christian life — he was certain that Christ had come into his heart and life, and that nothing could ever again be just the same. He had stepped out of the old life into a new. As he journeyed homeward even the familiar landscape had taken on a different appearance. The sky was brighter than ever before; the hills seemed to reach up to heaven, or was it that heaven was nearer? He had always thought it so far away, but now it had come down into his heart. The people in the car were more interesting to him than ever people were before. He studied their faces, and wondered how many of them knew of the love of Christ, and fancied that he could see the wondrous love beaming from the eyes and sounding forth in the voices of some of his traveling companions. He thought within himself — "It is only a few days since I passed over this road, yet I seem to have lived a lifetime. It is as if I had been walking wearily along, trying always to grasp something that I thought was the thing to have in this life, and never getting a hold upon it, and all at once coming to a place where I must choose whether I would keep on in

the old way or enter upon a new way; and no sooner was the choice made than everything was made all over new. Life spreads out before me more beautiful than I ever imagined it could seem, and a whole, long, unending forever to enjoy it in!"

One of the first things this young man had thought to do, after that brief hour in the little room back of the platform of the church, was to buy a Bible. There were Bibles at home; but he could not wait, and besides, he wanted one like those he saw in the hands of his new friends at the conference — one all his own, one marked with the date of that day which would now be to him the day of days. As he sat in the car, his mind and heart full to overflowing with the new thoughts and the strange emotions that surged through his being, he held this new treasure in his hand, now and then turning over its pages and reading a verse here and there.

At one of the stations, half an hour's ride from Clayborne, Rob Davis boarded the train. "You here!" he said, halting at the seat where Dean sat. "Where from and where to?"

"The one is plain enough, isn't it?" asked Dean, removing his valise to make room for Rob. "The other may be more puzzling. I have been roaming up and down for a few days. I spent yesterday in the city."

Rob's eyes rested upon the Bible, which Dean still held open at the passage he had been reading. "Seems to me that is a new departure, isn't it?" This with the little twinkle in his eyes which all Rob's friends knew meant fun.

Dean replied quietly — "Well, somewhat; yet I have occasionally looked into a Bible."

"Yes; but in a railway coach, like a minister or Sunday School teacher!"

"Well, would there be anything out of the way in being like either?"

"Not out of the way, but rather queer for you. That is a handsome copy. I suppose you have been buying a present for your mother?"

"No; I bought it for myself."

"For yourself! Dean Wilson buying a Bible for himself! You don't expect me to believe that?"

"I certainly do expect you to believe just that. It is quite time for me to begin to study the Bible." He hesitated just for a moment, trying to think how to tell it, not from any unwillingness to witness for Christ. Indeed, he did not at that moment think anything about witnessing. I doubt if he had ever heard of the words of his Lord — "Ye shall be my witnesses." But having taken a new position it seemed to him quite the proper thing to avow it, and his hesitation for words was only momentary; then he went on —

"I have something to tell you, Rob; I might as well say it now and here. Things are not just the same with me that they were the last time I saw you; within twenty-four hours all my aims and purposes and my hopes and plans have changed. I meant to tell it at home first, but I think the Lord means me to tell you now that I have become a Christian. I heard something in the conference yesterday about one of the disciples, who, as soon as he was called, went out to bring his brother to Christ. I was looking for the story when you came in. Now you are not my brother, neither have I any brother to bring to Christ; but we have always been friends and we have been in a good many frolics together, and now I want you to join me in this matter of serving the Lord. It is only a few hours since I began it; but I tell you, Rob, I realize that I have lost a great deal by not beginning sooner. I am just full of joy, and running over with enthusiasm! I want to persuade all my friends to take the same step."

And there in that crowded car Dean Wilson preached Christ to his friend.

"Well," said Rob, with a little laugh, "you are quite an enthusiast! You put it pretty strong, but I guess I'll wait and see how you make it go on a little longer run. Two of us turning straight about in one neighborhood would be a little

too much for the community to take in at once."

"Rob," said Dean, "you have always been better than I; you have never been so far on the downhill road that people have noticed it and remarked — 'He's a hard boy,' as they have in my case often and often; you have always been more ready to fall in with John's schemes, and I believe you are more than half persuaded to go along with me now. There is something that I want you to think about. In a few days you will have an opportunity to stand out fairly upon one side or the other. There is a test coming, and I want you to be ready to take a stand upon the right side."

"What do you mean?" Rob wonderingly asked.

"No matter now; you'll find out in time what I mean. Just be making up your mind whether you will be counted in on the side of Christ or with His enemies."

"You are a queer fellow — always were! But you are queerer than ever to-day. Say, what are you up to, any way?"

"You wait and see; but be ready. And see to it that you don't enlist under the wrong banner when the time comes."

Through the valley and up the three-mile slope that led to West Hill, the old lumbering stage-

coach wound its way. It was a snow landscape that they looked out upon, but very beautiful in the sunlight. It seemed as though millions upon millions of diamonds had been strewn upon the snow, and glittering pendants hung from roofs and the branches of the trees. Presently Dean said —

"I have always known that West Hill was beautiful in summer, but I never before realized how pretty a picture it makes at this time of the year."

"I don't see anything but a cold, bleak place," grumbled Rob. "I think it is dreary enough; to be sure, we have rather lively times nowadays, but it is a tiresome road up here. But when we get a railroad we shall be in the world. As it is now, we scarcely hang on at the edges."

Dean laughed at the grumble, as he asked — "Do you think we will have a railroad?"

"Why, it looks that way now. They were running out a line last week — went right through the Gulf — cut a corner off the Heckman meadow flats."

"Whew!"

"Oh, father says it won't hurt the farm very much; and I was down there, and heard one of the men say that right there would be the place for a station. That would be a boom for the Heckmans."

"I hope the road will go through; it would be a great convenience."

"It is pretty sure to go," said the stage driver. "The short cut from Lincoln to Clayborne is just what is needed to make the connection; and if it goes, it has got to go through the Gulf. It is the only pass through the hills. The grade will be pretty heavy; but if they go anywhere else they will have to tunnel the hill. I reckon to give up staging before another year rolls around."

"Sleepy old West Hill will have to wake up," said Rob, as the stage drew up to let him out at his own home. Turning back at the gate, he called out —

"Say, Dean, when does that little play you spoke of in such vague terms come off?"

"No reason why the Hill should be 'sleepy' with such wide-awake fellows around as that one," remarked the stage driver as they drove on.

But Dean was thinking, with a little sigh in his heart, that he had failed in his attempt to interest Rob in that which had now become to him of such vital importance. And Rob himself was thinking — "Of all the young people in this neighborhood to go and get religious, Dean Wilson is the very last one I should pick out! I would a great deal sooner have expected it of Rob Davis! Now I would! And I don't know but it is a good idea."

Dean did not find it as easy to speak of his new purposes at home as it had been to speak to his boy friend. His father and mother did not open the way at all. They were full of questions in regard to the relatives whom he had been visiting, inquiries in regard to their health, their business prospects, their homes, their farms and stores, and even their politics; but not an inquiry passed their lips as to the spiritual health of these relatives, not a word as to their prospects for eternity, as to their riches laid up in heaven, not a question as to whether they were about "the King's business." Had Dean's father and mother been Christian people, there might have been something in the talk which followed his home-coming which would naturally lead up to the one thing that he was particularly anxious to talk about, and yet I am not sure that such would have been the case. It is not always that Christians put these matters in the foreground. We talk about bank accounts, stocks and dividends, with not a word of the treasure laid up in a bank that never fails, where the dividends are sure. We talk about what our friends wear, with never a question as to whether they are wearing and keeping unspotted the robe of righteousness.

Dean tried to tell them at home about the day he spent in the city, but some way the talk would run off on other subjects. Did he hear anything

about the new railroad? Did he see anything about the new buggy they intended to get in the spring? And his mother said —

"If I had known you were going to stop over a day, I would have had you select the new parlor carpet."

Buggies and carpets and railroads! How far were all these from his thought that day in the city! He answered all their questions, and gave them such delightful accounts of everything that the quiet home was quite brightened up by his return, and his mother remarked to her husband — "What a world of good this little trip has done the boy!" But she never suspected all the good that had come to him until, in a day or two, a letter came from his new friend, Mr. Mills, saying that he would visit West Hill the very next day. This gave Dean the opportunity for speaking of the new interests which had come into his life. His father said — "Well, Dean, there was a time, a long while back, when I was interested in these matters. May be it would have been better for us all if I had kept on going to church, but away off up here there hasn't been much to encourage one in trying to live like a Christian."

"Well, father, I think we will go down to Clayborne often after this, you and mother and I."

A slight illness of Mr. Wilson had thrown the work all upon Dean, so that he had not found an

opportunity to talk with John in regard to the Society of Christian Endeavor. Indeed, he did not see him at all until that Saturday evening, when all the young people had gathered in the schoolhouse to listen to Mr. Mills. The notice which Dean had sent around to them was in the form of an invitation to meet his friend, and talk over a matter of interest to all.

The story told by the stranger was substantially the same as that to which Dean had listened that day in the cars, and which has been repeated again and again — that story of the beginning of the Christian endeavor movement and of its marvellous growth. Having studied the locality, and understanding the character of the young people to whom he was talking, the speaker was able to interest them and to show how the constitution could be adapted to their needs, showing the elasticity of this document after a few vital principles of the organization had been adopted. It seemed to John Heckman that the fact of there being, so far as he knew, no other young Christian in the neighborhood, was an insuperable obstacle in the way of the organization of a society there. Indeed, the thought which was now presented was not altogether new to him. He had read of the organization, and had been interested in its methods, but had considered it not at all adapted to the needs of West Hill young people. But

this stranger was putting it before them in a very delightful way, and making it appear to be the very thing which they needed. All objections melted away. Still, John could not see how they could have a society without active members enough to fill the offices. At length, the speaker asked how many would be willing to join as active members, and asked for a rising vote. They all looked to John Heckman to lead off as a matter of course, and some thought that perhaps Beth would rise. But Beth Heckman sat still, giving a little start of surprise as Dean Wilson arose and stood beside John. But another surprise awaited them. Rob Davis arose and said — "I do not know as I understand it, but I think you said — 'any young person who is willing to be known as a Christian.' If that is it, I want to be counted in. I am not sure that I am a Christian, but I am willing to be known as one just as soon as I have the right to the name."

"We will count you in, my friend, gladly," said the leader. "Is there another who wants to be counted in?"

Yes, there was another, and still another — Jennie Munson and Lizzie Davis. And yet another. Jimmie Howland had been sitting beside John, who now, as the boy stood upon his feet, threw his arms about him in loving welcome to the fellowship of Christians.

"Another?"

Still Beth sat still, and apparently unmoved.

When associate members were called out, there were a dozen or more ready to put down there names, but Beth would not join as an associate member. No, indeed. She heard some one behind her whisper — "You might know that if Beth couldn't be an active member she wouldn't be anything," and this was followed by a subdued laugh which did not escape Beth. Altogether, she felt a little cross, a very unusual state of mind for Beth Heckman. This movement was not to her liking, and she would have nothing to do with it. The only remark she offered in regard to the matter was made to John when they reached home. She said — "I think it was mean to go and start something to which only a few can belong. Seems to me Dean Wilson is taking a great deal upon himself." And she went off to her room, giving John no opportunity to reply.

It seemed a pity that this bitterness of Beth's opposition should come into John's rejoicing over the development of the evening. It was a surprise and a joy to him to find that, instead of his standing alone, all these young friends were ready to join hands with him in work for Christ. He said, with a happy little laugh, as he shook hands with Dean after the meeting —

"Well, I have been mourning because I

was alone, but it seems that we are quite a company."

"You have been a society of Christian Endeavor all by yourself," said Dean.

"The difference is," replied John, "that now we will write those two words with capitals."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RE-ECHO OF A SERMON.

"Through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ."

BETH, haven't you come to a Jordan?" John asked the question one day when, in response to his entreaty, Beth very emphatically declared that she would have nothing whatever to do with the Christian Endeavor Society.

The new organization was flourishing; though its membership was still small, its principles and object had taken hold upon the hearts of a few of the young people; and, notwithstanding Beth's expressed opinion that it was altogether unnecessary and uncalled for, the members already felt that it was just what they needed. Much to Beth's surprise, Tom Munson joined as an associate member. She had counted on him as one who would be certain to keep her company as an outsider. But Tom said —

"The girls want to attend the meetings, and

they cannot unless I drive up with them; I might as well, for Sunday evenings are rather dull at our house, any way. And you know anybody can be an associate member."

"I can't!" persisted Beth. "I can never do half-hearted things."

"Then why don't you come right out and join as an active member? I do not see but you are as good as any of them."

"Whatever else I may be, I am no hypocrite!"

Dean Wilson was the president of the society, and surprised them all by the ability which he displayed as a presiding officer, as well as by the rapid progress which he had made in the Christian life.

"I tell you, Beth, he talks like a minister," said Tom, as he stopped at the Heckmans' one evening, when the lookout committee, of which Jennie Munson was a member, held a meeting there. "I shouldn't wonder if he made one yet." This he added with a careless laugh; but Beth suddenly remembered that she had heard John and Dean several times lately discussing Greek and Latin text-books, and that Dean had carried off John's Latin grammar only the evening before; and she wondered if Tom's careless words might not have in them a bit of a prophecy.

"Dean and John are becoming great friends," continued Tom. "I am glad, for my part, that

John has somebody at last who thinks as he does about these matters; it does me good to see them together. They are not a bit alike. You would notice it at once if you came to the Christian Endeavor meetings. John talks like a lawyer — argues everything out. He is as set as a stump; when he once makes up his mind that a thing is right, he's there! And then he sets to work to reason the rest of us into the same way of thinking. One thing I have noticed; he has a 'thus saith the Lord' for everything. I don't believe that brother of yours ever makes a move unless he is sure it is along a line laid down in the Bible. And with it all he is genial and full of life. He is a kind of a revelation to me. Now my father lives by the Book, too, but John finds some things in his that father has never found in the one he uses. I wish that lookout committee would invite father to join the society. He would grow young again, may be, and find that verse about children playing in the streets of the city. I believe my father to be one of the most conscientious Christians in the world, but he is a little too sombre to recommend the all-important subject to other people."

Tom did not seem to notice that he was having the talk all to himself. As for Beth, she was having a little fight within herself; she had so long been John's friend and confidante that it gave her

a sharp pang to hear Tom speak of her brother's growing intimacy with Dean Wilson. Some way she felt shut out. This Christian Endeavor Society had come in between her and John, and she was jealous of it. She told herself that she had known all along that John would naturally come to have other interests — interests in which she could not share; she could not expect always to take up every scheme in which he became absorbed. It had come a little sooner than she expected; that was all. It might as well be the Christian Endeavor idea as anything; had he taken up the study of a profession, she would not have expected to join him in it; and she was a simpleton to allow herself to be disturbed about the matter. What if he and Dean were growing to be such good friends? She and Lizzie were great friends, and John had never shown any signs of jealousy; they still had their own plans and hopes and their little private fancy about the exodus, into which no one else could enter; she was, or ought to be, satisfied. Besides, she had always liked Dean, and she was really glad that he was growing to be John's friend; and having arrived at this conclusion, she thought she was quite willing to have things as they were. But she was not; that society still loomed up before her as something which she could not be interested in, but which stood right in her way. What was the

matter with Beth? She had read over the constitution of the new society very carefully; and had two or three sentences been cut out, she would willingly have subscribed to it. The conditions of membership were too hard for her, but she could engage in nearly all the work of the committees. She could even be willing to take part in the meetings. She did not see that reciting a Bible verse in the prayer-meeting meant any more than reciting one in Sunday School; anybody could do that. But the consecration-meeting, where "each member is expected to speak concerning his progress in the Christian life" — that effectually shut her off, so she told herself. She had been trying to establish herself in her position ever since. She assured herself that she had no Christian life to advance. She laughed a little bitterly as she said to herself — "John asked me the other day if I had not come to a Jordan. Why, I haven't even started out of Egypt, or even gone so far as to make up my mind to try to get away! More than that, I haven't found out that there is a hard task-master to get away from. I cannot understand what they say about the story of the Israelites and their wanderings, with their Jordan and their Canaan, being typical of the Christian's life. Looking at it another way, I could tell a great deal about it; indeed, I suspect that I know the story better than a good

many Christians, and I presume they would be astonished if I were to tell them of the progress we are making in this new-fashioned exodus here in our home and in the neighborhood. This modern pilgrimage interests me, but the other is beyond me. Queer, I suppose, to be more interested in the type than in the real thing, if there be any real thing to it. I am sure I do not see how I could be any different; I study the Bible quite a good deal, and I say my prayers, and do the disagreeable things just as they come to me, without a grumble; and I don't see that any of them do any more. Only there is something about John, for instance; and I do not know what it is, but it does make him different. And Lizzie, too, she is different; and yet, except for her interest and work connected with that society, she does just the same things she always did. If they had started a society that anybody could join, I would have taken hold of it, and attended the prayer-meetings and helped along in every way possible; but this thing is altogether too exclusive."

But Tom was saying —

"Dean is positively transformed. I never saw anything like it. It has been going on now for a good while. He used to be such a harum-scarum fellow — up to all sorts of doings; and suddenly he whisked about, and first he went into

that temperance work, then he threw himself into the C. L. S. C. with all his might, and now he puts his whole soul into the Christian Endeavor Society. Last Sunday evening he repeated the verse — 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Then you should have heard him talk! He does not argue like John, but he has such a pleading manner that one feels as if he were held. He didn't pretend to be original in his remarks, but said that he heard a sermon in the morning upon that text; and he told us what he remembered of the sermon — a kind of second-hand preaching, you see," and Tom and Beth both laughed at this idea. "I heard the same sermon," continued Tom; "but I did not get hold of any thoughts that I considered worth remembering. I thought it was as dry as chips, though when Dean told it off it was so interesting that a thought or two actually found lodgment in my dull brain. He said that God gave His Son as a sacrifice for the world, and that this was foretold in the prophecies, and in the promise made to Adam and Eve away back there just after the fall, and that the Old Testament sacrifices were typical of Christ's great sacrifice, and that those Old Testament people were saved through the sacrifice of the Son of God offered once for all. That the idea of an

atonement for sin, and pardon through the shedding of blood, was set forth in the sacrifices they offered, and though their faith was imperfect, yet it was accepted of God. I declare, Beth, the Old and New Testaments never fitted together in my mind as they did while I listened to Dean's second-hand sermon. He almost made me believe that there is something in it, after all."

Perhaps that lookout committee, with John as chairman, then in session in the Heckman parlor, in all their wise and careful planning laid out no better work than that which was done all unconsciously by Tom Munson as he rehearsed Dean's prayer-meeting talk. That sermon preached in the dingy, shabby Clayborne church by a faithful but discouraged pastor, that sermon which the majority of the hearers pronounced "dull and dry," in its re-echo had reached the ear of Beth Heckman as a most startling truth.

The talk drifted away into other channels; they discussed the prospects of the new railroad, or rather they talked of their own prospects in view of the fact that the railroad was already considered a certainty.

"It will be quite a boom for West Hill," said Tom; "especially if they have a station here, as they probably will. There is considerable property penned up here, which will be likely to see daylight pretty soon. Two men were up negoti-

ating with Mr. Scott for that bluff at the lower end of his farm. They want to use the stone for ballast."

"Perhaps our oak-trees will find a market," said Beth, and then the talk branched off upon the temperance question and the discouragements of the League, and finally ran into a good-natured dispute as to the best methods of conducting the C. L. S. C. meetings, until the meeting of the committee broke up and they joined the others for a visit all together. But through all the quiet talk with Tom, and through all the lively chatter with the others, the thought of the sacrifices of the Old Testament times as typical of the great sacrifice, ran in Beth's mind. In her study of that wonderful history she had skipped the typical law and the sacrifices. She had not found anything in their every-day experience that to her mind corresponded with these ceremonials, and now for the first time they assumed importance. I suppose that, had she been asked the question, she would have answered that these things were all types of the gospel dispensation, but up to this time it was an unmeaning fact. It all came upon her with force, that the offering of sacrifice was a type of Christ's sacrifice till He should come and offer Himself, and that it was the principal and most wonderful of all the Old Testament types, and that men were saved only through the shed-

ding of blood. She wondered how she could have been so intent upon finding parallels in their own intellectual and moral life, and have been so blind as to the deeper meaning that touched the spiritual life! Of course, John had seen it all along; and she remembered now, how he had sometimes tried to make her see it, but she had not understood. Suddenly, a sense of the need of a personal interest in the sacrificial blood of Christ came upon her. She was glad when their friends departed, and she was at liberty to go away by herself and try to think it out. And then, when she had spent several wakeful hours, her thoughts in a whirl, she wished it were morning so that she might busy herself with her work and get away from her thoughts. She told herself that she was sick and tired of Elizabeth Heckman, with her moods and her tempers, her plans and her dreams, her hopes and her ambitions. She wished she had never heard of those old Israelites, and that she and John had never planned an "exodus." The farther they went, the longer the road stretched out. There was more to it than she had supposed. Every new height gained only showed more land to be possessed, and now this serious side had come in to spoil all the enjoyment they had been getting out of their queer fancy! And now she told herself — "One thing is certain; I cannot play any longer with the inci-

dents of this history that seem to symbolize our external life, unless I can take in the real meaning that touches the soul life! I see it all, but I cannot feel it. It seems a wonderful plan all the way through, and wonderfully wrought out in the sacrifice of the great High Priest. I suppose I have heard that expression — 'Christ our High Priest,' hundreds of times; but it has never until now been shown to me that the priests offering sacrifices for the people were a type of Christ offering Himself for the sins of the world. I see now how things are linked together; the chain reaches down all the way from Adam to us. I see the wonder and the beauty of it all, but only as an outsider — I wonder if I want to become a part of it! The same old question that was asked long ago — 'Who is on the Lord's side?' is asked over again here on West Hill just now, in the invitation to join the Christian Endeavor Society. Perhaps the time has come for me to decide the question."

Turning back to the study of the exodus with a new-born purpose in her heart, Beth saw new and wonderful truths which had been hitherto hidden from her. The Spirit was showing her "wondrous things out of the law." And more and more she was coming to understand the need of an offering for sin; and if for the sins of a people, then for the individual, for her — for Beth Heck-

man! She saw how the covenant between God and His people Israel was ratified with blood, and how in the New Covenant as in the Old the sacrificial Lamb was slain; only in the New, God had provided the offering which the soul by faith might lay upon the altar. That which had been to her simply a fascinating story now stood forth as a series of vital truths, as a part of God's plan of salvation. Losing none of its interest as a type of their every-day practical life, the history became more absorbing as symbolizing the Christian's progress in spiritual life.

"There are two sets of truths here!" John looked up from his book to find that Beth had closed the Bible, and that her face had taken on the look it always wore when she was, as she expressed it, "trying to get inside of things." She continued — "One lies underneath the other, and I have never before seen it, or realized even that it is there! Though I have studied the one on the surface, and turned the truths all over and over, and fitted them to every possible emergency, I have never discovered that they were meant to be transparent and to show the other set!"

"I suppose the trouble has been with your spectacles?" said John, with a tone of inquiry.

"Yes; I suspect that I have been looking through the wrong ones. What I see now is

wonderful; but, John, I would not have missed what I saw with the other pair."

"Suppose you were to try looking through both pairs? You would find the truths all interwoven, and the fibres of the spiritual life running into the web of the every-day practical living, the threads of which in turn lose themselves in the other, making altogether a fabric of wonderful texture."

"I see! You mean that religion and business ought to go together?"

"Yes; you can put it that way. I mean that Christ's prayer for all who should believe on Him, may be, and should be, answered in the life of every one of His followers. He asked that they might be kept in the world, and that they might neither be of the world, nor yet be taken out of it. The spirit of obedience, which is the mind of Christ, ought to so enter into every act of the Christian that even what seemed the most trivial things will be done as unto the Lord."

"That makes a serious thing of living," said Beth, very gravely.

"But if you refuse to look into deeper things, they are there just the same; and does the shutting your eyes to them make the matter any less serious? If by 'serious' you mean gloomy, you are mistaken, and should take it as just the opposite. You will find that your double set of truths fit into each other beautifully."

Beth did not seem inclined to talk any more, and John turned back to his book. Presently, she went up to her own room, and did not appear down-stairs again until an hour or two later, just as John was starting out. Then she came down with her out-of-door wraps on, and said — "I think I'll go to the meeting with you."

She was always doing unexpected things, but perhaps she never surprised her brother more than by this proposition. She had been urged by both himself and others to at least attend the meetings of the new society, and had so pointedly refused, and had seemed so entirely uninterested in the movement, that, knowing how persistent she could be, they had quite despaired of winning her over. Not quite; they were praying and hoping that some time she might be brought to think differently.

The meeting progressed after the manner of a wide-awake Christian Endeavor meeting, and presently Beth spoke with her usual bright manner, but with something in her tone that was different from the tones of the old Beth. She said — "I want to tell you something. An echo from this meeting fell upon my ear two or three weeks ago; and the thought expressed has echoed and re-echoed, growing louder instead of fainter after the manner of echoes, until I had to take the message as to me from the Lord. And now

to-night I avow myself a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ — a Christian Endeavorer. I have no story of Christian experience to relate; I do not know how it is, but within a few days, yes, even within a few hours, I have come to see the things of this life and of eternity in a very different light. The blood of Christ has changed everything for me. And now my watchword is, 'All that the Lord hath said will I do.'"

If her attendance had surprised John and the others, her remarks surprised them still more. You know how it was in the early days of the New Testament — "where many were gathered together, praying. And as Peter knocked, . . . when they . . . saw him, they were astonished. But he . . . declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out." It was the old story of unexpected answer to prayer. I sometimes wonder that the Lord does not take us at our estimate of His power and readiness to answer our prayers. If to us He were to say — "According to your faith be it done," would we not miss many blessings?

How the meeting went on after that, Beth never knew. She had taken her seat well back, and she could not help overhearing the irrepressible whisperer upon the back seat, who mistakenly thought that her tones were covered by the singing which followed — "Well, Beth Heckman

found that the thing was bound to go even without her; so she gave in as gracefully as she knew how!"

"Hush!" whispered the more proper of the two.

"She wouldn't join as an associate member because they can't hold an office. Trust her for getting inside of a popular thing!" persisted the other.

The singing ended, and the whisperers returned to propriety; but Beth was saying within herself — "And so this is the way they look at it! If they only knew how ready and willing I am to serve anywhere!" Then she began her work as a Christian endeavorer with the resolve in her heart that she would, if only her Master would let her, win those girls for His kingdom. She had already been wondering what work she could find to do different from the things she had been doing; and here it was set right before her — souls to be won for Christ!

CHAPTER XXIII.

SATAN PLANS AN OVERTHROW.

"He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den."

GREAT changes were taking place at West Hill. The railroad was rapidly pushing its way through the hills, and by midsummer the smoke of a locomotive was seen rising from the ravine which cut through the lower end of the Heckman farm. As had been predicted, the route selected crossed the meadow flats, and the company paid Mrs. Heckman a generous sum for the "right of way." It was definitely settled that there was to be a freight and passenger station at that point, and already several buildings were in process of erection. Altogether, West Hill seemed likely to come into prominence in other respects than as "an elevated portion of land." The new road was a benefit to the people in more than one way. Some of the farmers had beds of gravel for sale, others had stone for the crusher,

and others, like Mrs. Heckman, had timber to dispose of, so that the railroad company scattered a great deal of money amongst these not overwealthy people. It was a very busy summer. As Rob had predicted, sleepy old West Hill had waked up. It had been waking up ever since Beth Heckman gave her first tea-party, though unthinking people fancied that it was the screech of that first locomotive whistle that aroused it from the slumber of years. If along with the rest the evil influences need not have been aroused to greater activity, the awakening might perhaps have been considered an unmixed blessing. But Satan, on the alert as usual, seeing the aggressive nature of the work of the young people, set himself to work to thwart their plans, if possible.

In one instance, at least, the plans of this enemy seemed to have succeeded. So quietly had these plans been arranged that no one suspected the scheme to rob the young Christians of their privileges and to block their work. The annual district election came off at the regular time. For several years the same man had been re-elected trustee, and, as he had proved efficient, no thought of change entered the minds of the majority of the voters. As the election occurred at a very busy season, many, thinking that nothing of any special interest was to come up, remained at home. What was their surprise and

consternation to learn afterwards that Colonel Parsons had been elected trustee by a trifling majority? But for the fact that he would not be likely to engage John Heckman to teach the school for the coming year, there would have been very slight opposition to the colonel. Many were sorry on this account, but no further complications were anticipated.

But it soon became evident that the colonel had been elected for a purpose. When the young people gathered on Sunday evening for the Christian Endeavor meeting, they found the door of the schoolhouse locked, and a notice was posted, which read thus:

TAKE NOTICE. — To whom it may concern: For the future this building will not be opened except for school uses.

(Signed) COL. PARSONS.

Great was the indignation.

"He has no right," said one. "The law allows the schoolhouse to be used for all religious meetings."

"At the option of the trustee," said John.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite so; and Colonel Parsons would not dare to make this move unless he were sure of his ground."

"But how mean!"

"What shall we do?"

"Let's go and hold our meeting under the trees opposite the colonel's house," suggested Lizzie Davis.

"Or in front of Howland's," was Robert's amendment.

"It looks as if they wanted to drive us into adopting Crusade methods," remarked Beth.

Meantime John and Dean were in consultation, the result of which Dean announced.

"Perhaps the best thing we can do to-night is to hold a short out-of-doors service right here, and then adjourn to meet at Mrs. Heckman's Tuesday evening to talk matters over. Meantime I will undertake to interview Colonel Parsons and see if anything can be arranged."

So there under the stars they stood in a little group and sung a hymn of praise. Then the leader said — "As we cannot read the Scripture lesson in the dark, we will prove that it is profitable to have passages stored away in our memory. We will each repeat a verse or two. It is a good time to dwell upon the promises. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.'"

There followed in quick succession words of promise and encouragement which God has given to His people from time to time, and which, during the last few months, had been impressed upon the hearts and stored in the minds of those who

made up this worshiping company. Many of the selections now repeated were full of comfort and cheer. When Beth's turn came, she recited in a clear voice — "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build."

Afterward, two or three brief yet earnest prayers were offered, those who prayed being mindful of their present distress and the pressing need of the hour — help and direction. Then there was more singing, after which they went home.

As their voices in the hymns filled the air, and floated away on the soft summer breeze, Mr. Howland started up, exclaiming — "I thought Parsons was going to put a stop to that nonsense."

"What nonsense?" asked Jack Swan, who, as usual, was lounging away the evening at the saloon.

"Why, that habit a lot of them have got into of using the schoolhouse for all sorts of meetings; that is, they go there for a frolic and then to make it appear all right they call it the meeting of some society. It did very well until they got to going Sunday nights. That is a little too much for a Christian neighborhood."

"Seems to me," responded Jack, laughing, "that you are getting very jealous of the reputation of the neighborhood. Now, I don't know

much about Christianity myself, but I should judge that a few other things needed reforming before we could lay claim to being a Christian neighborhood."

"Oh, take us as a whole, we are not the worst people in the world, and you know I always keep everything very quiet here on Sunday."

"But that meeting at the schoolhouse is a religious meeting," insisted Jack.

"Nonsense! Tom Munson and Dean Wilson running a religious meeting! They say Dean is at the head of it, too. Much religion there must be about it! And they have drawn my Jimmie into it. I can't have him following the lead of that set."

"But you know Dean has changed, turned over a new leaf, they say."

"Well, any way, the colonel isn't going to have any more meetings in the schoolhouse. He promised that when we put him in. We don't need much religion up here; it isn't good for business."

"Trade falling off, eh?"

"Well, not to hurt me yet, though they have got away two or three of my best customers. But I don't mean they shall get much the start. They are after Clarence Howard. Now, Jack, you don't want to let them spoil him. He is a pretty good fellow if we can only keep him with

us. I hope you'll try to manage him; you can do it better than any one else."

"All right; I'll look after him."

Thus these two plotted against the peace of a home, plotted for the ruin of a son and brother. Would they succeed in ruining, body and soul, this brother that the sister and her friends were trying to save? It seems scarcely possible that he can escape, and he is only one of thousands upon thousands.

While they were talking, the father heard Jimmie's step upon the walk, and called to him — "Where have you been?"

"Up to the prayer-meeting."

"Seems to me you had rather a short session. Getting tired of it?"

"No, sir! But somebody, Colonel Parsons, I suppose, had been mean enough to lock us out of the schoolhouse, and he says we can't meet there any more."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir; that is just what he has done, and I think it is a mean trick."

"Well, I suppose, then, your meetings are done with?"

Mr. Howland could not altogether keep his triumph out of his tone, but the boy was too excited to notice it. He replied quickly —

"No, sir! We shall hold the meetings just the

same, if we have to go marching up and down the streets singing and praying as we go."

"No danger of their doing that; they are not all as zealous as you are, I venture to say."

"I can tell you, sir, Colonel Parsons has taken a bigger job on his hands than he thought for. We are not the sort to be put down easily," said the boy, respectfully but firmly.

"Now see here, my boy. You may as well give up this nonsense at once. You have been indulged in your notions too long. It doesn't look well to have a boy fighting against his father and his father's friends. When you were a little fellow, it was sort of sharp and funny; but you are old enough now to begin to think about the interests of business."

"I'll never have anything to do with this business!" said the boy, stoutly.

"There! You have said enough for this time," returned his father, still good-naturedly. "I am going to the Brewers' Convention, Thursday, and I shall leave you to run the store while I am away; so you'd better not talk stuff that you can't live up to."

"I shall live up to what I say. I'll run the store, but I am not going to sell liquor."

"Indeed! I think we will see about that. Go to bed now, and sleep off some of your nonsense." As the boy left the room, the father

added — "You see, Jack, how they are spoiling the boy. If shutting them out of the schoolhouse doesn't break them up, we will try some other means. I am not going to submit to having my business and my boy interfered with."

"Are you really going to leave Jimmie in charge for the two days you expect to be away?"

"Yes; he is quite capable, and he will attend to the business for all his talk."

The next morning Dean called upon Colonel Parsons to ask the cause of the sudden withdrawal of the privilege of meeting in the schoolhouse. The colonel replied, in effect, that the building was not intended for any such uses. If the privilege were accorded to one society, it must be to others, and the door opened for things which it might not be proper to bring into the school building.

"Has any such contingency arisen?" asked Dean.

There had not, but the colonel wished to avoid the possibility of any such embarrassment.

"But," urged Dean, "the trustee has the right to decide what is proper and what is not. It seems hardly fair to put us out when three fourths of the families of the district are represented in these organizations."

Yes, the colonel understood all that; they were represented by children, and in some cases the

parents were opposed to having their children drawn into these societies; there were too many organizations — no sense at all in so many. The district school afforded all the means of education which the boys and girls of West Hill needed; and if any of them were anxious for more religion, he supposed they could get it by going down to Clayborne to church. Any way, they had no call for a prayer-meeting, and besides, he had heard that they intended to start a Sunday School soon.

"Yes," replied Dean; "we expected to open next Sunday."

So the colonel had heard, and he determined to head it off. It was altogether uncalled for. Young people shouldn't be setting themselves up to teach their elders. Parents know what they wished to have their children taught, and if they did not see fit to teach them the Bible, it was no business of boys and girls to undertake the work. It was all of a piece with John Heckman's ideas; that fellow had brought more nonsense into the neighborhood than they had ever had there before; West Hill had managed to get along without such goings on for years, and there was no reason why such things should be permitted now.

"At least, you will open the building for us for a few weeks until we can find some other place. It is not fair to shut us out without warning."

But fair or not, the building was closed, and it

was going to stay closed. There wasn't a place in the neighborhood that they could get, and it would not do any good to waste time over the matter. The colonel wouldn't so much object to the reading-circle, though too much learning and too much religion had a good deal the same effect upon a community. So there was no use in talking; the schoolhouse would not be opened.

"But suppose the majority of the voters of the district desire it?" asked Dean.

It would make no difference how many nor who desired it; Colonel Parsons was in power, and he would act for himself. They could put him out, he supposed; but they could not dictate to him.

Dean stopped a moment at the Heckmans' to tell John and Beth the result of the conference, and then went home, much perplexed over the state of affairs.

About the middle of the afternoon, John came to the pump for a drink. Looking up, he saw Beth sitting at the window of her room with her Bible open on the sill. He called out —

"Say, Beth, what did you mean by that verse you recited last night?"

She turned over the leaves of the book quickly, and replied —

"See here, Moses! Do you remember this — 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak

unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering; of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. . . . And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.'"

"But, Beth, do you think it could be done?"

"That is not the question, is it? Should you not say — 'Ought it to be done?'"

"You think it ought?"

"I do not see anything else to do. We cannot give up religious service up here on the Hill, and we must have a place of meeting." Then, as John turned to go back to his work, she called after him — "Think it over, John. Perhaps this is another Jordan."

"Beth is wild!" he told himself. "And yet, if the command should be 'Go forward,' I suppose the way would open."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOY'S IDEA OF BUSINESS.

"Not slothful in business . . . serving the Lord."

"JACK will come in and help you in the store while I am away," said Mr. Howland, addressing his son.

"I don't want Jack — I can do it alone. I don't like Jack Swan one bit, and I won't have him around," replied the boy stoutly, adding — "Besides, if he helps, he will have to be paid; and I want the money myself."

Mr. Howland laughed, then said, meditatively — "I suppose you could do it; that is, if you had any head for business."

"Of course I can do it! I expect to do a big business. I'll get out some posters and let the boys know I am running the establishment, and they will come in to buy lots of candy and such things. You must send to Clayborne for a supply."

"All right! Send in for what you want, and you can have all you can make. See here, boy. I'll make a bargain with you; you shall run the business and have all the profits while I am away. How'll you like that?"

"Good! You mean that you'll lease me the store and set me up in business regularly?"

"Yes. I'll write out an agreement, and we will both sign it and have it all in good shape."

"I guess I can trust my father's word," said the boy, proudly.

"Oh, of course you can; but I want you to learn to do business, and this is a good way to begin. Do you know what a contract is?"

"Well, I should say I did."

"And could you draw one up yourself?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Heckman told us about such things in our 'Practical Matters' class. I know a lot about law and business!"

"Humph! If you make the kind of a business man he is, I shall be sorry; but try your hand, and let's see how much you do know."

Accordingly, the boy, falling in with the scheme the more willingly because he saw a way to carry out a plan of his own, drew up a contract, partly in legal form, and partly agreeable to his boyish notions. It was a curious document; but it bound his father "as party of the first part" to deliver over to his son Jimmie "as party of the

second part" the goods in the store, with full liberty to conduct the business upon his own responsibility and in his own way; and it bound the boy to attend to business, and to render a strict account of the sales, and to pay over to his father a sum equal to the wholesale price of the goods sold. It laid so few restrictions upon the new proprietor that Mr. Howland remarked upon the fact, and suggested that it gave great latitude.

"Of course! But you see a fellow can't do anything to advantage when he is all tied up with restrictions."

His father was much amused and well pleased with what appeared to be an unexpected development of a business taste, and with the boy's ability to draw up such a paper; and when Jimmie suggested that so important a document should have witnesses, Jack Swan was called in, and in much glee the agreement was signed and witnessed.

Fifteen minutes after Mr. Howland had disappeared around the curve of the hill road, posters in large letters were nailed up in front of the saloon. The inscriptions were such as the following—

"No liquor sold here during the rest of this week!"

"Buy your supplies at the Temperance Store!"

"Attention! Fresh Candies! Fine Oranges! Come on, boys, and have a picnic at the Temperance Store!"

If these bulletins were remarkable for the absence of artistic taste or ability, they were, nevertheless, very legible, and the meaning not to be mistaken.

During the morning, two boys engaged by Jimmie canvassed the neighborhood with written handbills, which stated briefly that Jimmie Howland was running a temperance store, and that the patronage of the temperance people was earnestly solicited. If the people were too busy to come to the Corners, the boys were prepared to take their orders. By noon two or three men had caught the idea, and determined to raise a "boom" for Jimmie. Mr. Scott came in and talked a few moments, read over the mimic contract and laughed heartily, then went out among the farmers, dropping a hint here and there.

Two or three men, undismayed by the posters, went in, hoping to get their accustomed drinks in some way.

"What does this mean?" asked one.

"It means just what those signs say!"

"But I suppose we can help ourselves?"

"No, sir! No liquor can be had here while I am in charge!"

"Did your father know you were going to set up this sort of thing?"

"What if he did, or what if he didn't?" replied the boy proprietor, good-naturedly.

"Nothing; only he will raise the roof when he comes home and finds it out!"

"He can't find any fault," said Jimmie.

"Can't! Why?'

"Because he has tied his own tongue," said Jimmie, laughing.

"What do you mean?" was the next question.

"I mean that I have a contract with my father, giving everything into my charge while he is away, and I am going to run this thing as I like. Liquor makes me sick to smell it, and I shall not have any around."

"But your father's customers won't like it."

"Can't help it."

"They will withdraw their trade."

"All the better. I should not care if nobody ever bought another glass of liquor here. If I could drive that class of customers away, I should think it was a good day's work."

"Humph! Your father will not agree with you."

"I presume not. But the store is mine for the present, and I shall not have any whiskey dealt out; that's settled!"

The customers went off, half-angry and half-amused, saying — "The little upstart! Won't his father give him a settler!"

Presently Colonel Parsons came down to the store; he stopped, read the signs, then walked in.

"What's up now?"

"Notices."

"Notices?"

"Yes, sir; didn't you see them?"

"I should say I did! Say, boy, aren't you carrying things with a high hand?"

"I don't know; if trade keeps up all day like this, I shall carry my hand pretty near the bottom of this sugar barrel before night," replied Jimmie, scooping sugar from a half-empty barrel. "Can we serve you a cup of hot coffee? It is all ready in the other room, and real Jersey cream, too."

"And your father consented to this piece of nonsense?" asked the colonel.

"My father is not responsible for anything here at present. I told him I would not sell liquor, and he said I could run things as I pleased. Better let us give you a cup of coffee, sir. You'll find it first-rate." And Colonel Parsons actually sat down to a cup of coffee in what was generally used as a card-room. A few pieces of drapery judiciously arranged, and the neighborhood flag, which Lizzie Davis had just brought in and draped opposite the entrance, with the vase of flowers for the table which Beth had sent, gave the room a very bright and inviting appearance. The table was covered with a white cloth; and Mrs. Swan, entering into the spirit of the occa-

sion, made the coffee, and poured it out for the customers, serving the most delicious cakes, made after Mame Howard's recipe. And Mame herself was up-stairs with Mrs. Howland, stirring and baking more of those same little cakes; for the first batch had gone off so quickly that there was need of two pairs of hands to keep up the supply.

The colonel found the coffee as recommended, and quite enjoyed the fun of the situation; but as he went out he felt called upon to give Jimmie a word of warning —

"It seems like a good joke to you, I suppose; but I am afraid that there will be a row in the camp when your father comes home. Better not venture too far, my boy!"

"I am not afraid! Father always lets me do what I want to."

Dean Wilson was driving to Clayborne that afternoon. A mile or two down the valley he met a neighbor, and stopped to say —

"I believe you are a temperance man."

"I believe I am!"

"Well, I want to suggest that you go in to Howland's this afternoon, and order your fall supply of groceries."

"At Howland's! I never trade there; the fact is, I never go where liquor is sold, if I can avoid it."

"I understand; but there is a new departure

up there," replied Dean, explaining, and adding — "Better go in and encourage the little fellow."

"But, after all, it is a saloon, and whiskey will be sold as freely as ever when Howland gets back."

"Probably; I wish we had amongst us faith in this as the beginning of a new order of things. I suppose that it is not impossible that Howland himself may be brought to see the matter in a different light."

"It would take a miracle to change him!" returned the other.

"Well, as to that, it has taken a miracle to change any of us," returned Dean. "But it seems to me that when we have a respectable place open on the Hill it is a good plan to patronize it, and I think Jimmie will use the money he makes to the advantage of the neighborhood."

The boys caught the spirit, and there was a run upon the candy cases, and the oranges disappeared like magic. Mr. Scott, coming in that evening, and finding the stock running low, the coffee-sack empty, and the sugar giving out, volunteered to go to Clayborne the next day for supplies. He took a circuitous route in order to give a hint of what was going on to two or three families, who, he knew, would be interested to some purpose. And so the trade of the second day was not at all behind that of the first. The

fame of the coffee and the dainty cakes had reached the Gulf, where the railroad employees were hard at work, and, in consequence, business in that line increased.

Mr. Howland arrived at Clayborne upon his return trip, Saturday, a little after noon. He had to wait there an hour or two, and stepped into the wholesale grocer's where he usually obtained his supplies. He was greeted with the remark —

"Trade must be pretty good up your way!"

"Oh, I don't know. Why?"

"I judged from the order I filled yesterday; it was considerably larger than usual in some lines."

"Yesterday?

"Yes; Scott was in with his team, and said he was going right out empty, and would take the goods; so we loaded him up. There were three barrels of sugar and a sack of coffee; but here's the bill, isn't it all right?"

Mr. Howland took the bill and looked it over; it was an order in Jimmie's hand.

"I knew it wasn't your writing," said the grocer; "but Scott said you were away, and that your boy made out the order. Scott said it was all right, and I supposed he was reliable."

"Oh, yes; it is all right. I have been away, and my wife and the boy are running things. I presume they sold out, though I supposed they had enough in stock." As he left the dealer's, he

was saying to himself — "Three barrels of sugar — the boy must be crazy! I never order more than two at once, and there was a whole barrel when I left. And we had flour enough to keep going for a fortnight!" He also had occasion to go to the bank where his deposits were made. The teller remarked — "There was a deposit made yesterday in your boy's name."

"Yes — how much was it?"

The amount staggered him; never before in all his years of liquor selling had he taken in so much money in two days. What did it mean? He was in haste to get home. On the way up, one of his neighbors took a seat in the stage.

"Well, how's things on the Hill?" he asked.

"Pretty lively! That boy of yours seems to be a born store-keeper! I was in yesterday after a quarter o' tea; and, if you'll believe it, he persuaded me into buying a whole pound, and a lot of things besides! He just beats you all to nothing for business!"

The father was of course pleased to hear these things of the boy, but he was puzzled. He had expected that, with the assistance of his mother, Jimmie would keep the place open, and perhaps sell or give away a few ounces of candy and sell a few drinks. You see he had not taken the boy's declaration in regard to selling liquor in earnest, and it never entered his mind that things would

not be going on about as usual. It is quite probable that the loquacious driver would have volunteered information, had not that individual been too much absorbed in discussing the probability that passenger trains would be running inside of a month, and in negotiating for the sale of his horses with the farmer who occupied the seat in front. So when about five o'clock the stage drew up in front of his home, Mr. Howland was quite unprepared for the unusual sight which met his eyes. In addition to the placards put up that first morning there was another which read —

"Ice cream and lemonade served here this evening!"

Mr. Munson's horse and buggy stood in front, and Jimmie was tugging at a sack of flour, which he was trying to lift into the wagon. Mr. Howland's first impulse was to take the burden from the boy's shoulders; but checking himself, he passed inside, and left him to struggle with it. Mrs. Howland was weighing out sugar as her husband entered. He greeted her, and turned back to see Jimmie running in with some packages, which the driver had handed out. "Here, Mr. Munson, is the corn-starch that Jennie ordered this morning; and if you can just drive up and lay this package of cocoa on Mr. Ames' gate-post, they will be on the watch for it." Then, turning toward his father, he sprung forward; and,

putting both hands upon the man's shoulders, bringing his father's face down to his own, he exclaimed —

"Well, papa, I am glad you came early! I need a clerk. Mamma and I are about tired out, and we expect a big rush to-night."

"Indeed! And am I not to take possession, now that I am here?"

"Not a bit of it! You know our contract reads — 'Saturday at midnight.'"

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure! Didn't I write it myself?"

"I should say you did!"

"I tell you, we have been doing a big business! I sent money to deposit yesterday, and again this afternoon; I was afraid to keep so much in the house when we were alone; you know you said you might not get home before Monday morning," and Jimmie named the amounts which he had deposited.

"Jimmie Howland, do you mean to tell me that you have sold groceries enough to amount to all that?"

"Yes, sir; that is, counting in what we took in the other room. I have every sale put down; there's the book. And I have had a lot of new customers. You will see the names all there. Mr. Scott took a barrel of sugar, and then Mr. Ames ordered a barrel; and I had to send down

for it, and for another barrel to sell out of. But, papa, you must be hungry. Just walk into the other room, and take a cup of coffee and some luncheon."

Several people, seeing Mr. Howland in the stage, came in, ostensibly upon errands, but really to see how he took the new departure. To those who knew that he had been to a liquor-dealers' convention the situation was rather amusing. He had the good sense to keep his anger — if he felt any — in the background, and seemed to enter into the joke, as he was pleased to call it. He took his coffee, and ate the delicate cakes and sandwiches, and said to the gentleman who sat at the table with him — "I am sorry I cannot offer you a glass of wine, but you see this is a temperance house."

Later, he asked — "Jimmie, who put you up to this trick?"

"Nobody! Not a single person besides myself knew what I meant to do until the signs were up. I made them myself, out in the barn loft, before you went away; and I didn't even tell mother; so you can blame no one else."

"But do you think you did right?"

"Yes, sir; I told you I would never sell a drop of liquor, and you didn't say I must; and then you made the proposition that I should have all that I could make and run things as I liked, and

I have made a great deal more than you ever did in three days, liquor thrown in."

"But you have had an extra run of business. The people have laid in supplies for a long time, and won't want anything more."

"Yes, I have thought of that; but you see I haven't hurt your trade any, because your regular customers did not care to take advantage of the strike, and did not buy anything extra, so they will be buying right along just the same."

"You are a young sharper," said his father, laughing heartily. "I suppose now you will think about setting up an opposition store and running your father out."

The evening passed off pleasantly. The ice cream was all sold and the lemonade-tank emptied several times, and Jimmie was forced to sleep with quite a large sum of money in his possession. It was about ten o'clock when he delivered the keys to his father, saying earnestly —

"Father, I wish you would keep on this same way."

"Tut, tut, child! It did very well for a joke, but now it is over, we must get back to business again."

"Business!" echoed the boy. "As if we hadn't done the best business in the last three days that was ever done on West Hill! And now to talk about getting back to business!"

"Boy, you are getting nervous and excited; this has been too much for you. Get to bed, and don't get up to-morrow morning until you are quite rested."

When the boy had gone up-stairs, the man said to himself — "I declare, I believe the child really hoped I would give up and try his way. He does not realize that his wonderful luck was due to the fact that a spirit of fun took hold of the people, and they tried to see what they could do so that he might come out ahead. But, dear me! He must have worked hard. He does not realize how much harder work it would be for me to sell only groceries. Why, I would much rather sell liquor altogether than groceries altogether if I could make just as much money by either. Yet I hate to disappoint the boy — all the boy I have left, too." And the man thought of three little graves where the summer grasses had been growing since before Jimmie was born, and again he told himself how hard it was to thwart the child in any of his wishes. But this was too absurd; he would meet with ridicule from his friends if he yielded to the boy's whim. Besides, somebody else would be sure to open a saloon if he closed his, and it might be a far less respectable one. It was curious how solicitous the man suddenly became for the respectability of the neighborhood. True, since the organization of the

Temperance League he had lost several profitable customers, and, though he would not acknowledge it when Jack Swan had questioned him, he knew it to be a fact that trade had fallen off considerably. He had hoped that the railroad with its station so near, would bring more custom, but, as he expressed it — "That railroad company were the worst fanatics of all. They would not employ in any capacity a man who was not a total abstainer." He had tried to treat this affair as a practical joke and as something to be laughed at, but there was a serious side to it which would continually present itself to his mind. The pleading face and voice of his only son were not to be put aside and altogether disregarded, and some way there was stealing over the man the conviction that unless he yielded the point, he would surely lose his boy. Not that he feared that the boy would desert his home; but he realized that Jimmie was already living in another world, and that he could never come into the life the father was living; and he exclaimed in sudden anguish — "I wish for the boy's sake I were out of it!" He did not think at all of his duty to God, or to himself, or to his fellow-creatures; only how to retain the love and confidence of his boy. He was quite unused to such sweet and tender thoughts, and he tried to shake them off. For a man who had just come from a conference of liquor dealers, where

the traffic had been boldly upheld, and where strong resolutions of opposition to the rising temperance sentiment and of mutual help and support had been passed, his thoughts were taking a remarkable turn. But perhaps this can be accounted for.

Up-stairs, under cover of the bed-clothes, having obediently gone to bed, Jimmie was praying over and over his simple, earnest prayer — "Dear Jesus, show my father that it is the best way."

Down in the Heckman grove, where the moonlight struggled through the thick foliage, and where, being under the brow of the hill, the soft summer breeze was scarcely felt, John, Dean and Rob were sitting upon the rough seats left there since the last picnic, talking things over. At length, Dean said — "Boys, I suppose we are agreed as touching this thing. Then suppose we ask it of the Father?" And may we not believe that their petitions mingled with Jimmie's, and that together they ascended swiftly to the throne of God, and that swifter yet came the answer? And is it any wonder that Mr. Howland was moved as never before? Had Beth Heckman known of the thoughts that were stirring the man's soul, she would have said that he had come to his Jordan. Would he cross over into respectability and virtue, or would he turn back to ways of sin?

CHAPTER XXV.

MEMORIAL STONES.

"What mean . . . these stones?"

JOHN HECKMAN was driving home from Clayborne one October afternoon. Something — it may have been the haziness of the atmosphere, the bright tints of the forest, the autumn garb of meadow, pasture and corn fields, or it may have been the thought of his errand to town — recalled so vividly that long, toilsome walk up the slope upon another October afternoon five years before. How much had come into his life since! Days of toil, nights of anxiety, hours of wrestling, months of waiting, and years of patient endurance, disappointments and misunderstandings, hopes deferred, and griefs which had entered his soul. Yet he had never been utterly cast down, never quite discouraged, never forsaken. He had never lost sight of the pillar and the cloud, and whether the command

had been to abide in that place or to go forward, to stand or to strike, patience for the one or strength for the other had never been withheld. As he drove slowly homeward, he thought it all over — how they had been led and helped, and how, after all these years of struggle, they had reached the goal, the "Canaan" toward which he and Beth had set out one winter evening when the purpose that had been forming in John's mind found expression in a parallelism that had caught Beth's fancy and had been her inspiration ever since. The journey had been fully as long and wearisome as they had foreseen; the mistakes and failures of their young heads and inexperienced hands had been many. But, as Beth said, they had "come out even at last." And John's errand to Clayborne had been to pay the note in full.

"I think," said Lawyer Judkins, "that the colonel will be surprised. He told me a month or so ago that he supposed he might as well give it up as a bad debt. None of us suspected that you had been laying up money, and we thought the colonel would have to wait a few years longer for his money."

"Nevertheless, it is here, even to the uttermost farthing," returned John; and having taken a proper acknowledgment, he left the lawyer's office with a light heart. Next, he called on

Stephen. Dr. Stephen Heckman was a very different person from the lounging, shambling young fellow of five years before. His figure was erect, his step firm, and his speech, while retaining some of the old peculiarities, evinced culture and strength of character. His welcome was cordial, and his response to John's — "Well, Stephen, the Heckmans are out of the wilderness," was hearty.

"And you are twenty-one to-day," he said. "I have been thinking about it and wondering how you would celebrate."

"Well, I have begun the celebration by calling upon Judkins and paying up the Parsons note. I might have done it before, but I had a fancy that I would like to sqaure things to-day," replied John, with a little laugh that sounded like a strain out of a song of triumph. Then he added — "I came in partly to say that if you want a horse we can spare the bay colt. He is fairly well broken, and will, I think, answer your purpose very well, and mother says she will let you have the money for a cart, or gig, or whatever you want in that line."

Stephen turned himself around, away from the desk where he had been writing out a prescription for a boy who waited in the outer office.

"See here, old fellow, are you not reversing the usual order? People generally receive presents, instead of bestowing them, on such important

anniversaries. Really, when will you have done with your 'coals of fire'?" The words and tone seemed meant to be jocular, yet there was an undertone of pain in them.

"I don't understand you," was John's surprised response.

"Don't? Well, no matter. I'll take the colt, and thank you." Then, laying his hand upon John's shoulder, he said, his voice trembling—

"John, once for all, let me say that if I am anything better than the miserable, reckless scamp I was when you came home, I owe it to you and I want to thank you. You sacrificed for me, and, after all, you have come out ahead. *I* can't afford to give away horses." This last with a little gleam of fun through the mistiness in his eyes.

"That is all right, Steve. You are getting a fine start, and will soon be independent. One thing more: mother and Beth are getting up a 'high tea'—a birthday cake and all the accompaniments, I suppose—and they want you and Lizzie to come out on the four o'clock train. They seem to think that my being twenty-one is an occasion for a family party."

"All right. We have been trying for several days to get out to the Hill, but have been kept busy with making arrangements for housekeeping. We hope to get settled next week, and then, if you people out at home think best, we want

Frank to come and board with us and begin his Greek at the high school with Professor Jennings."

It will be concluded that Stephen Heckman must have made a man of himself, else Mr. Davis would never have been willing to give the happiness of his only daughter into the young man's keeping. It was not only that he was different in outward manner and speech — a radical transformation had taken place in the inner being. Dr. Watson had been a strong, kind friend, yet neither out of his own experience nor through his belief in the power of God to rescue the tempted was he able to help Stephen in those times when the old habits of idleness and dissipation threatened to resume their sway and to drag him down. Try as he would, Stephen could never fully adopt the doctor's sceptical views. That which upheld John and made him hold to his ideas of right under the fire of scorn and persecution, that which had transformed Dean Wilson from a reckless, ungodly young man into an earnest Christian endeavorer, working and studying with the Christian ministry in view, and that which could make of the scoffing Tom Munson a leader in the Christian endeavor movement in Clayborne, must be something more than a delusion. Curiosity to see how Tom managed things led him to accept the invitation to attend the meetings of the soci-

ety of which Tom was the president; then a real interest followed, and now for two years Clayborne had had no more earnest Christian or zealous church-worker than young Dr. Heckman.

Thinking of all these things, John forgot that they would be waiting for him at home. Nowadays they oftener went to Clayborne by rail, but John owned a fine horse, and frequently indulged his fancy for driving. Dr. Stephen and his wife had already arrived by train when he reached the house. Frank took his horse to the stable, saying — "Hurry up; supper is almost ready." Beth was in the kitchen, busy with the puffs that were John's favorites. He stopped to say to her —

"Well, Beth, the long pull is ended; we are free from debt."

The girl drew a long breath, and then said, with relief in her tones —

"I begin to feel as if we had got there. But, John, do go and brush off the dust and get ready for tea. We will talk it all over by and by." This she added as John seemed inclined to linger for a talk, and, thus admonished, he went off to his room to make some changes in his dress in honor of Beth's supper.

But the puffs which she had mixed with much care, and which were coming up beautifully in the scorching oven, and which, to be enjoyed, should

be eaten as soon as baked, were cold and heavy before all were ready to sit down to supper.

After taking care of the horse, Frank put his head in at the door, saying —

"I'll run down to the post-office before supper. Won't I have time?" and was off without hearing Beth's reply to the effect that he would have to hurry. In a few moments he came back, ushering in at the side-door a stranger, a tall, broad-shouldered man, bronzed and bearded, and well dressed, saying, by way of introduction —

"This gentleman wishes to see Mrs. Heckman."

"You wish to see my mother, I presume," said Beth, turning to the stranger, adding — "I will call her."

"If you please — but wait. Is your mother quite well? Can she bear anything sudden?" Then as the color faded out of Beth's face, he added, quickly — "Don't be frightened. Beth, don't you know me?"

Beth stood still, looking at the stranger, her thoughts all in a whirl. Then, suddenly, she said — "I don't know you; but can you be — Joe?"

"Yes; I am Joe, and you are my little sister," and he took the girl in his arms, repeating — "My little sister!" Then, releasing her, he said — "You will know best how to tell mother."

But she did not know at all "How to tell

mother." Going into the parlor, where Mrs. Heckman sat talking with Dr. Stephen and Lizzie, she said — "Well, mother, we shall have to make room for another at the table. Some one has come by the Lincoln train."

Beth thought she kept her voice steady, but, in spite of her effort, there was a quiver of joy in it, which her mother detected at once. And Stephen, too, noticed it, though his thought was not the same as the mother's.

"I suppose it is Dean?" he said, laughing.

"No, it is not Dean; and you will never guess who it is. Mother, can you?"

"It is Joe," interrupted Mrs. Heckman.

"Well, yes; it is Joe."

Mrs. Heckman arose, took a step or two toward the dining-room, swayed, and would have fallen had not Stephen caught her in his arms.

Why try to tell it? Joe had come home; and they were all in a state of excitement, and the mother quite overcome; and that is all there is to the story.

It was a long time before they were calm enough to think of supper; but at last Beth came down to earth, and announced that they would have to eat bread, for the puffs were quite ruined. It was explained to Joe that this was an anniversary and then they sat down, a plate having been set for Joe beside his mother. Mrs. Heckman

found under her plate the receipt in full from Colonel Parson's lawyer, and Beth opened a queer-shaped package, to find a paper-weight composed of twelve geological specimens fastened together in the form of a rude monument.

"Memorial stones!" she exclaimed; then more explanations were given, until Joe began to understand the situation. Presently it fell to Stephen to cut the birthday cake. In the centre, under the frosting, was hidden a small, square box directed to "John Heckman." That young man was quite taken by surprise. The box contained a handsome gold watch, with a note which was as follows —

"The Israelites set up stones of memorial — twelve of them; we have preferred to let the twelve figures on the dial remind you of our joyful deliverance and our entrance into Canaan.

Your friends,

MOTHER,	STEPHEN,	LIZZIE,
BETH,	FRANK,	JIMMIE,
	DR. WATSON."	

What a happy evening it was! Joe looked on curiously, not more than half understanding these brothers and sisters, who seemed almost like strangers. Slowly he was gathering into his mind all that this anniversary, with its business transaction and its gifts, meant to the family; and his heart warmed toward the young brother who had

so bravely borne the burden and so courageously led them out of their difficulties.

In all the time of his absence the family had heard from Joe but rarely. At long intervals he had written to say that he was alive and might some day come back; but he never gave them any address; so they never wrote to him, and during the last four or five years they had not heard from him at all. Once, when he had been gone about six years, he heard from home in a curious way. In the course of a long journey Colonel Parsons came to a mining town, where he had to wait an hour or more for a train. At the station he was seen and recognized by Joe Heckman, himself quite safe from recognition; six years had changed the slender boy into a full-grown, bearded man, whom even his mother would scarcely have known as her son. He managed to get into conversation with the colonel, and to glean some items of information about the affairs at West Hill. He threw the colonel quite off the track by remarking —

"Yes, I lived there a while. I worked a spell for Crawford on the east side; you wouldn't remember me, of course, but I knew you. If you should see Crawford, just tell him that Addison is all right and doing a good job. Yes, I know most of the folks by sight. Are the Heckmans there yet?"

"The Heckmans? Oh, they are there; at least, one of the boys is running the farm; they are up to their ears in debt — owe me a thousand dollars that I'll be bound they'll never pay. But they show up well; make pretences of being somebody. Poor lot. Steve got disgusted with the way things were going and left. The fact is, I don't know much about them. There was another boy, but he ran off long ago. I tried to help John along; but he wouldn't be helped, and since that I have let them alone."

The train was in, and Colonel Parsons took his seat; then, glancing out of the car-window, watched the young man as he walked across the platform and disappeared around the corner of the building. All at once, something in the poise of the head and the build of the shoulders reminded him of his old neighbor, Joe's father; and he said suddenly to himself — "I declare, I believe I have been talking to Joe Heckman!" But the train was flying, and the colonel dismissed the subject with a little laugh and the thought — "Well, I guess I didn't give him a very good opinion of his folks."

And so it was that when Joe made his unexpected appearance at West Hill it would be difficult to say which was the more surprised, himself or his family. He expected to find them burdened with debt, and living in a very poor

way, with tumble-down buildings and dilapidated fences. He was not prepared for the air of comfort, or the neat and well-kept appearance of the farm. And withal, he was a little disappointed as well as surprised. His had not been fruitless toil; and he had come home with the intention, as he said, "of setting the family up in the world," and here they were already "set up." The debt was paid; they were all doing well; the neighborhood was prosperous, growing rapidly into a village; what was left for him to do? However, he soon rallied from the momentary disappointment, realizing that it was an unworthy thought, and was able heartily to congratulate them all.

Alone with his mother, he said — "I meant to buy my forgiveness and make amends for all the past, and now I find everything is done. I threw away my chance to do a grand thing, and John picked it up. I am glad for him. But that fancy about memorial stones gives me an idea; I'll see to-morrow if I can work it out."

Coming home from Clayborne the next day, he handed John a package, with the remark —

"Here, my boy, take this as my share in the birthday present. I suppose they didn't run their memorial stones through a smelter; but this represents twelve gold nuggets, and you may build a monument to suit your own ideas."

"You may be sure he will build it of law books," exclaimed Beth.

"And so that is the way the wind blows," returned Joe.

"If only Colonel Parsons could be won over," said Beth, with a little sigh, when at last she and John had found a chance to talk it over.

"You know," returned John, with a twinkle in his eyes, "that there were tribes to be driven out and cities to be taken after they reached Canaan. Colonel Parsons may be our Jericho."

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down," quoted Beth.

"After they were compassed about seven days," was John's suggestive quotation as a rejoinder.

"Yes, with trumpets." She spoke slowly, as if studying a point; "I wonder what *our* trumpets are."

CHAPTER XXVI.

JERICHO.

"Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city."

DURING all these years Colonel Parsons had never let slip an opportunity to annoy his young neighbor; and when John had sought a reconciliation on one or two occasions, he had been rudely repulsed; and if by chance they met the colonel never returned John's courteous salutation, nor, indeed, appeared to recognize his existence. Mrs. Parsons did not share her husband's ill feeling toward the Heckmans, though all friendly intercourse between the families had ceased. Once she said to Beth —

"My child, I am deeply grieved over this trouble. It has made the colonel more bitter than ever toward the young people, and more opposed to their work in neighborhood reform. You know he never took much interest in the young folks until he got up that liking for John;

and I was glad of that notion, for I thought it was good for him to have John's hopes and plans and queer ideas to think about; and he actually took to reading the Bible, too! Of course, I do not blame your brother for standing by his principles, but I wish it needn't have happened. I have sometimes thought that it would have been better if John had made some excuse for not selling the trees, and not come right out in opposition to the colonel's business."

"But, Mrs. Parsons, he couldn't have done that. In the first place, it wouldn't have been like John; and then, you see, we might have an opportunity to sell to some one else; then an excuse would have had to be studied up for selling. Don't you see there might be no end of complications?"

"Oh, yes, the straightforward way is the best always, of course; though it sometimes seems to lead us into a wilderness of difficulty. I would like to have you come and see me — run in and out as you have been used to doing — but I know it would not be pleasant for either of us, the colonel is so dreadfully set in his prejudices. I hope the feeling he now has will wear off in time; but, Beth, remember that I am your friend and will always be ready to help you or John, if I have an opportunity. I shall miss you, my dear."

Mrs. Parsons' life had been wonderfully brightened by the unwonted intercourse with her young

neighbors, which had been brought about by the colonel's sudden whim, and which had been so abruptly cut off because of his unreasonable enmity. She had grown to look for Beth's coming; and she had become interested in the girl's schemes and ambitions to a remarkable degree for one accustomed to live much within herself. She missed it all, and had waited through these months and years, hoping something would occur to soften the colonel's feelings and take away the bitterness. But instead, he piled his grievances higher as time went on. The year before John was twenty-one, a manufacturing company at Lincoln sent up an agent to purchase those oaks that were the cause of the unfortunate estrangement. The offer was very liberal, and the Heckmans accepted it promptly. Nothing is more certain than that in a country neighborhood or in a village (for such West Hill was now becoming), a knowledge of a person's business transactions is considered public property, to be talked over and gossiped about; hence the matter was not long in coming to Colonel Parsons' ears, and he not knowing that the money received from the sale was safely deposited awaiting the day of settlement, as agreed upon between him and John, saw only another evidence of an intention on the part of his debtors never to pay the debt.

There had been other matters in the neighbor-

hood which had not been pleasing to Mr. Parsons. When Mr. Howland, in the depths of the night-watch, had listened to the tender, pleading voices of his dead children, to the earnest appeal of his only living child, to the promptings of the Spirit of God, and had resolved that he would give to his boy a father of whom he need not be ashamed, and when he had proceeded to carry out his resolve, the colonel was more than surprised; he felt as though he had received a personal affront. He had been one of Mr. Howland's strongest supporters, signing the petition for the license and using his influence to induce others to sign it. Personally, Colonel Parsons had no political ambitions; but he was interested in politics, and held the opinion that he controlled the vote of West Hill, and it was well understood that he controlled it for the saloon. With the saloon abolished where would be the petty power that he had enjoyed? Finding Mr. Howland determined to close out the business, he tried to buy him out; failing in this, he resolved to set up a new saloon, and forthwith applied for a license. He had succeeded in getting the required number of names upon his petition, though he was not very proud of some of them. To his great astonishment his petition was rejected. There were two or three causes which led to this result, so gratifying to the majority of the people of West Hill, though

very unexpected and displeasing to the petitioner himself. One member of the board had long carried a personal grievance against Colonel Parsons, and here was an opportunity for revenge. A protest against the granting of license at West Hill, bearing numerous signatures, had been presented; yet it is quite probable that this might have been disregarded but for the added weight of Commissioner Hardin's grudge. Upon such matters as the indulgence of a personal pique do important interests turn. The third member of the board had, by dint of great effort, been elected by the no-license party. It would be interesting to begin at that Fourth of July with its "New Declaration of Independence," and to trace the steps that had led up to this partial victory of the temperance people of the township of Clayborne, and to note how the influence of the Temperance League had spread and been felt in remote neighborhoods; but all this can only be hinted at in this chronicle. When Colonel Parsons found himself thwarted in his schemes, he was not slow to locate the blame. He declared angrily—

"It is all John Heckman's doings. He is the most mischievous person in the community."

"Seems to me," remarked Mrs. Parsons, "that you are giving that young man credit for a great deal of influence; why, he is only a boy and a very quiet one; surely he can have very little

political influence, and I suppose it is politics that decides such matters."

"All the same, the young upstart has set going the revolution that is overturning things here on the Hill. The young folks all follow him like a flock of sheep, and some of the older men act about as silly and senseless."

"But what you call a revolution seems to be in some respects a good thing; I am sure the boys are not nearly so lawless as they used to be. It is a good while since you have had any trouble on account of their stealing the fruit."

"Nonsense, wife! You women imagine that because two or three young fellows have taken to preaching, the whole neighborhood must be getting pious. You needn't take any stock in it. It is all just a cloak to cover up wickedness."

"I don't see any necessity for a cloak," replied Mrs. Parsons; "I am sure the evil-disposed people around here have always got along and been very comfortable without any such covering. Why should they take to wearing a cloak, which, if worn for the purpose you hint at, must be very ill-fitting and uncomfortable?"

Secretly, Mrs. Parsons was very glad of her husband's disappointment, though she knew that things might run with considerable friction for a time.

The teacher whom Colonel Parsons engaged for

the year following his election as trustee proved a failure, and the following year the old trustee was re-elected; and to the gratification of the boys and girls, Mr. Heckman was again installed as principal, a position that he held for two years.

When the plans for building a chapel were divulged, there was a lively interest manifested. Only a few opposed the plan; for the most part, the people were very liberal in giving money, labor and materials. Mr. Scott was the strong and ready helper of those who had undertaken to carry the scheme through. "Capital!" he exclaimed, when Dean and John went to talk it over with him. "Just go ahead! I'll tell you, boys, what I'll do; you know that three-cornered lot where the arm of the ravine branches off? It is the prettiest spot anywhere around. I used to think I would build a house there some day; but I guess the old homestead where my mother lived is a good enough spot for me to live and die in, and I'll give you young folks that corner for the Lord's house! I hope it will be counted in on my reckoning; but I don't know — I suppose if I give it just to get ahead of Parsons, it won't count for much!" The profits of Jimmie Howland's first business venture went into the building, and the spirit of sacrifice took hold of the hearts of young and old, so that the work moved

THE CHAPEL.

rapidly forward. It is probable that the school building would have been re-opened, so strongly was the public sentiment setting that way; but having once started on that line, the people determined to go forward and build. Colonel Parsons stood almost alone in his opposition, and though three years had passed since the building was finished and dedicated to the service of education and religion, he had never crossed its threshold. Mrs. Parsons had smuggled in a generous contribution toward the building fund, and often attended the services held in the completed edifice, which was at once an ornament and a convenience to the neighborhood.

Though John Heckman was popular among his neighbors and in the school, and a leader of the young people, yet Colonel Parsons succeeded in making things very uncomfortable for him; and he often found his plans thwarted and his influence undermined by this implacable enemy. It was no wonder that with their way of looking at things John and Beth felt that here was a "Jericho," walled about so that their love and friendship and neighborly kindnesses — and more than these, including them all, Christ — found no way of entrance. That wall of enmity and opposition stood in the way of their further progress, and seemed impregnable; yet, as Beth had quoted, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down," and

now these young workers began in earnest to compass the city about with prayer.

Colonel Parsons received a note from his lawyer that his claim against the Heckmans had been paid in full and the funds deposited to his order. This was, as Lawyer Judkins had predicted, a surprise to the colonel, but a very gratifying one.

"Now, wife," he said, "we ought to have a jollification of some sort. Shall we go on a journey, or give a party? I suppose you would like to have new carpets and new parlor furniture, eh?"

"I will tell you what I would like to do — invite Mrs. Heckman and her family to tea, and ask the Wilsons and the Davises. It is a long time since we had a tea-party."

The boldness of this proposition fairly took away the colonel's breath. As soon as he could master himself, he said —

"You are the mistress of the house — you can invite whom you please, and feast them as you like; but I shall be away the day the Heckmans are invited here!"

"Oh, of course, if you do not wish to entertain them, that ends it. But it really seems to me that there is no occasion for keeping up an ill feeling any longer. The Heckmans are now free from any obligation to you, and it might be just as well to secure their friendship. You can never tell what a friend may be worth to you."

"We have got along without them for quite a spell, and I guess we can stand it a while longer," said the colonel, a little gruffly.

"Perhaps we can, but you have held that old grudge long enough. It makes us all uncomfortable; and now you have your money, you can afford to be generous and overlook the whole matter, even supposing John to have been to blame."

"I confess I never looked for getting a cent without a process of law; but I do not see why, because people have paid their honest debts, they should be at once feasted and taken up for bosom friends." Then, noticing that his wife's eyes were filling with tears, he added — "Now, wife, I'll give you half this money out and out to do what you please with, if you will only rest satisfied with things as they are. In fact, I'll promise to do anything else you are a mind to ask."

Mrs. Parsons looked up quickly, and seemed about to speak, then checked herself, and with a weary sigh resumed the work she had dropped during the conversation.

"What is it?" said the colonel, more gently than was his wont. "You were going to ask something?"

"It is nothing."

"But it is something! You were going to ask something, and you know I promised," insisted the colonel.

"Well, I can tell you what came into my mind, though I will not ask you to keep your promise; for perhaps this would be as distasteful as making up with the Heckmans. I was wishing you would so far lay aside your prejudices as to go to the chapel with me sometimes. It would not be much to do, and I think you would enjoy things that are held there. And it would be pleasant for me to have my husband go with me sometimes."

Some way, just at that moment the worn look on his wife's face struck the colonel. He was fond of his wife, and had never thought how she cared about his not going with her. The neighbors would think it queer if he should take to church-going — but what did he care for the neighbors? They might think what they pleased; he had promised; and if this thing would please his wife and she would drop the Heckman question, he would go for once, any way.

Ever since the chapel was opened the Christian Endeavor Society had maintained a Sunday evening service. It was not their regular society prayer-meeting; that was held on Friday evening. The Sunday evening meeting was of a varied character. Sometimes the pastors of Clayborne came out to preach; sometimes they held a missionary meeting, a temperance concert, and then again a Bible reading. The service was always

well attended, whatever might be its nature. On that particular evening when Colonel Parsons made his first appearance in the chapel, Dean Wilson was the leader in a Bible reading. The subject was, "What We Owe to the Lord."

I presume that during the days when the great company of Israelites compassed the city in silence, the dwellers in that walled city must have heard the sound of trumpets, though giving no sign that they heard. Colonel Parsons appeared indifferent as usual, but one verse of that Bible reading reached his ears and found lodgment in his heart — "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," were the words that, read out in a clear voice, seemed meant for the man who, intrenched in his pride and his stubbornness, never asked what was "required," but, "what did Colonel Parsons will to do?"

Said the leader — "To some of us God has given the strength of youth, the vigor of manhood; to some, long years and wide experience; to some, wealth; to some, opportunities for study. Does our active labor correspond to our strength and vigor; our record of work left behind to our long years? Do our deposits in the treasury of the Lord correspond with our deposits in the banks? Are we making our treasures of knowledge tell for the advancement of the kingdom?" The words were very simple, but Colonel Parsons

felt that for his lengthened life he had given no return, for his wealth hoarded up in bonds and bank stocks he had paid no dividend.

It was not the only time he attended the Sunday evening service. Indeed, it came to be quite the common occurrence for him to accompany his wife; but, so far as any one knew, he went only to please her. Sometimes he made a sneering remark, which led her to wonder if it would not have been better to have let things go on as they were. And so weeks went by, John and Beth sometimes wondering when the crisis would come, when they would hear the command to shout.

One dark, rainy November evening they were returning from the evening service. Neither Mr. Parsons nor his wife had been present, which was not strange, considering the weather. John was swinging a lantern, and Beth, with a waterproof wrapped about her, was picking her way as best she could amid the puddles of mud and water that the light revealed. As they passed the colonel's house, they noticed a light in the carriage-barn, and then heard a voice, which they at once recognized as the colonel's —

"Hullo, there! Is it any one who can drive this horse down after Dr. Watson? My wife is sick — dying, I am afraid — and Patrick is away."

Handing Beth his lantern, John sprung across the street, and, without a word after his answer-

ing shout, "Yes, I'll go!" he slipped the traces over the hooks, buckled the reins, and springing into the carriage, took from the colonel's hand the lantern with its reflector, and, fastening it upon the dash-board, drove off in the rain and darkness. When Beth told her story at home, Mrs. Heckman, with Joe as an escort, went at once to the bedside of the sick woman. In an incredibly short time Dr. Stephen entered. He was greeted with the colonel's not very cordial "I expected Dr. Watson."

"Yes, sir; and he will be here soon, I hope. He was out of town, coming in from the North at twelve, and Dr. Elmer is also away. So John drove to the station to bring Dr. Watson up without delay as soon as the train comes in, and I came to tell you and to do what I can in the meantime — that is, if you will let me." As he explained, he was rapidly divesting himself of his wet wraps and warming his benumbed fingers at the fire that was glowing in the dining-room stove. "The doctor cannot get here before one o'clock, and it is now half-past ten." And he stood awaiting the colonel's commands, quiet, dignified, yet with a keen look in his eyes and an alert expression on his face, which, more than anything else, led his host to say —

"Well, I suppose you may as well see if you can do anything to relieve her. She will die if

something is not done." And rather ungraciously he led the way to the sick-room.

The train was late that night, and it was nearly two o'clock when John and Dr. Watson arrived. At first, in response to John's hurried statement of the case, Dr. Watson declared he would not go, that Dr. Stephen was equal to almost any emergency. But, upon being told that very likely the colonel would refuse to accept the services of Stephen, he consented to go. In a pouring rain they drove up the hill, the doctor grumbling all the way over the stupidity and obstinacy of people in general and of Colonel Parsons in particular.

They found the patient resting quietly, having had no return of the paroxysms for an hour, and, after listening to Dr. Stephen's account, the elder physician, turning to Colonel Parsons, said, in his gruffest tone — "Parsons, you owe that young fellow a debt of gratitude. I think I'll lie down and leave him to watch, and we will go home together by daylight." And then they persuaded the excited husband to try to get some rest. So it was Mrs. Heckman and her son who watched by the sick woman through the slowly passing hours. With the breaking day the patient opened her eyes, and, recognizing Mrs. Heckman bending over her, she whispered faintly —

"I have been very sick. But this must have been God's way."

Two days later, as she lay back upon her pillow, pale but restful, and with a happy light in her eyes, the colonel said — "Well, wife, your tea-party wasn't just as you planned it, but it was a success. I guess we have had all the Heckmans here, if not all together." Then, as she turned a questioning glance toward him, he added — "Yes; it is all right. I told John this morning that I had been an old fool, and that after this there would always be room on the road I travel for two people with opinions. The fact is, a man with an opinion is apt to want the whole road. I ain't converted yet to John's way of thinking, but I don't know — may be I'll get there. I tell you, wife, when you lay so sick I was almost ready to promise anything."

Then he went hurriedly out as if he were ashamed of this unwonted manner of speech, but really he wanted to get away from that ever-recurring Bible verse — "Unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required." The obligation had been heavy before; now his wife, whom, in his rough fashion, he loved, had been given back to him. How should he pay the debt?

CHAPTER XXVII.

COLONEL PARSONS SUMS UP THE CASE.

"Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?"

"I WONDER at your choice of the law as a profession," said Joseph Heckman, after listening to John's plans. "I should have guessed that you would have chosen to study theology. That seems more in your line."

"That is where you are mistaken. My tastes run in the line of law and politics. A preacher of the gospel I mean to be always and everywhere; but I do not think I am called to the ministry. I believe that God calls men to their work, whatever it may be, just as truly as He calls them to the ministry. The world needs Christian lawyers — men who will dare to labor for the enactment and execution of laws founded upon the word of God; and it seems to me that at the present time, with the crisis that is at hand in the fight against the enemies that threaten to under-

mine and overthrow our institutions, there is an imperative need, a call, for men of conscience and courage to step to the front."

"But does not the same call come to ministers; and would you not then have greater opportunities, and more power to influence and accomplish more of the work of saving souls, which I believe you Christians put first as to importance?"

"That is a work that, I believe, calls for the exercise of talents that I do not possess; and"—here John hesitated for a moment, then went on in a tone which was an apology for talking about himself—"if as a lawyer, and if in God's way and time it might come to me to be a law-maker I could do even a little toward putting away an evil that every year brings thousands upon thousands to hopeless graves, and so clear the way for those whose work it is to save and bring into the light individual souls, shall I not be doing a good work and rendering acceptable service to God and humanity? There is a call for consecrated talent and consecrated service in other lines than in the gospel ministry. If I were making, as I think some do, a compromise with conscience, putting this promise of faithful Christian work in place of obedience to the command to preach the word, mother's fears would very likely be realized. She thinks the pathway of those in the legal profession peculiarly beset with temptation. But if in

this the 'pillar of fire' goes before, I shall know that I am in the right path, and that is enough for me to know."

"It is all right," said Joe, laughing a little; "you may be whatever you please, but you'll be a preacher to the end of your days. I am willing you should study law; but I did not exactly see how with your notions, which have cropped out considerably in the little time I have been at home, you could decide to do it. But I understand; you mean to sanctify the profession."

"I mean to consecrate everything to the service of God and humanity," said John, earnestly.

Joseph Heckman did not more than half comprehend this young brother; but the more he learned of the history of the past five years, and the more he saw of the results of the labor with which these years had been filled, the more he respected and admired John. He could not at all enter into and appreciate the motives that had prompted John, or the principles by which he had been guided and upheld; yet in the few weeks of his intercourse with the family at home he had come to honor and respect the Christian religion as never before.

In family council it had been decided that John should yield his place as head of the home affairs to Joe, and should enter a law school in the city. At first it seemed as if West Hill could

not spare John Heckman, as if the Heckman household could not spare him. But John said — "My work here is done. I thought I was going to live on here and enjoy the Canaan; but there seems to be a new life opening before me, and I must listen to the summons."

It was not easy to leave the home and neighborhood that had grown so dear through trials endured and victories gained — the well-stocked farm with the orderly barns; the house with its pleasant rooms and inside comfort as well as outside neatness; the chapel, the school, the friends of the Sunday School, the Christian Endeavor Society and the C. L. S. C.; all his familiar round of work must be left behind just when there had been lifted from his shoulders the burden that had rested there for years.

As he was to enter upon his studies at once, he had little time even for farewell calls. Perhaps it was not surprising that he lingered longest at Mame Howard's. Ever since that winter night when he had taken Clarence home, Mame had turned to John for help, which he was only too glad to give. As they stood together in the hall, saying a few last words, Mame, with quivering voice, said —

"John, you will look after Clarence, will you not? I do not think he is doing as well as he ought, and since Jack Swan went to the city I am

more troubled than before. Sometimes I think that Satan has made a special agent of Jack to ruin my brother. I know it is asking a great deal of you; you will be so busy; yet" —

"Mame" — John spoke quickly, as the girl hesitated for a moment — "you could not ask too much of me. I will do all I can to save Clarence. And you will be praying for us both?"

It was not an easy burden that John had thus assumed at the outset of his new life. To look after and try to lead back to the right paths one so seemingly determined to go astray required a great outlay of time, strength and patience, and the exercise of a strong faith in the power of God to save. It called for many a long, weary search in places not pleasant for John Heckman to enter, for many hours of watching, for much patient waiting, while the answer to earnest prayer seemed afar off.

And so, filled with study and with labor, not only for Mame's brother, but for others whose steps tended downward, John Heckman's days were passed until he had completed the course of study marked out for himself and had passed his examinations.

And then?

* * * * * *

The other day, just when the world was bright and fragrant with the June roses, when the mead-

ows were all dotted with the daisies, and the red strawberries were peeping out from under the green leaves, when the bobolinks were pouring out melody, and the bluebirds and the yellow-birds were making dashes of color through the air, Mrs. Heckman, with a few guests, sat upon the piazza, which was Joe's addition to the old house. Out under the trees, swinging in the hammocks and sitting in garden chairs, there was a group of young people. Among the older ones Colonel Parsons was saying —

"Well, now, I wouldn't have believed that such changes could come to a place inside of eight years! There's John a lawyer, admitted yesterday! Well, I might have known it that day he came to talk about paying the debt. He knew then a lot more law than I did, and I have been litigating more or less for forty years. And the wedding is going to be in the fall? Well, they say that John has been the making of Clarence, but I guess he and Mame will have to watch over the fellow a spell yet. There'll never be any safety for such as have the appetite fastened upon them until the saloon is ruled out of the country. Yes, I am made over! That's the greatest miracle of all. The days of miracles are not past, according to my way of thinking. And Dean Wilson a preacher and going to marry our Beth as soon as he gets through the seminary! And

that is one thing I came over to talk about; I am going to give the setting-out! No use to talk; you have got Frank to push through his education, and ways enough for money; and John has some up-hill work yet; so I am going to set Dean and Beth up in life. And I shall do it handsomely, too. They tell me that Steve is doing wonders in the city, curing some old fellows that never expected to be cured. He has got a knack for doctoring; I knew that ever since I caught him dissecting a calf one day down in the lot, though I scolded him roundly for fooling away his time. Then when he fixed my wife up, that time he came without being sent for, he showed his skill finely. Joe seems to be turning out quite a farmer and business man generally, and the way he is taking hold of church affairs is wonderful. Well, I never expected to live to see a church organized here on the hill, and I never expected to belong to it. I tell you, it was a good day for us when John came home."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Heckman; "John did a good work here, but you must remember that the new railroad has been a great help to West Hill. And a great many things have been done, which could never have been brought about but for that."

"Well, that may be so; but I heard something the other day that brings John out ahead for all

that! They say that one day he was coming over from Lincoln in the stage, and a man who was a passenger complained of the hard ride over the hills, and John said there ought to be a railroad across. The man said it would cost too much; the grade would be too heavy, and any way they would have to tunnel. But John had studied the hills pretty thoroughly, and he spoke up and said there was a way to get through; then he went on, and told how by running up south a way, there was a pass. The man seemed to like to talk, and he drew John out. It seems he was one of the capitalists that went into the railroad company, and they do say that the road would never have been built if John hadn't given a hint of what was possible."

At this they all laughed, and Beth, who had left the group under the trees and seated herself on the step at the colonel's feet, exclaimed — "Well, you are making out quite a case for John."

"He does not need an advocate," replied the colonel; "his work tells."

"I have sometimes wondered," said Mrs. Parsons, "what could be the secret of John's life."

"I can tell you," replied Beth; "he is constantly turning aside to listen!"

And then a silence fell upon them all.

EATON (Frances).

A QUEER LITTLE PRINCESS. Quarto, illustrated, 1.50.

Henrietta Minerva Longstreet Nelson is her full name. She is not a royal-blood princess but the "queerest, dearest, best little girl in the world," nicknamed "Little Princess," because — as the nurse expresses it — she is so "fine and pretty." A fair-haired, prattling, whimsical, self-sacrificing little peace-maker is her "Royal Highness," by her artless ways bending everybody to her own sweet will. There is something indescribably pathetic in the dismay of the sensitive little creature, so innocent and so cherished, when she first finds out there is sorrow in the world, and spells out s-o-r-r-o-w in her troubled sleep, and, though the circumstances are quite unlike, her ingenuous talks with poor Joe, the gardener, are hardly less touching than those of little Eva and Uncle Tom. It is a charmingly picturesque group of vassals that pay fealty to their liege-lady.

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